The New Criterion

March 1988

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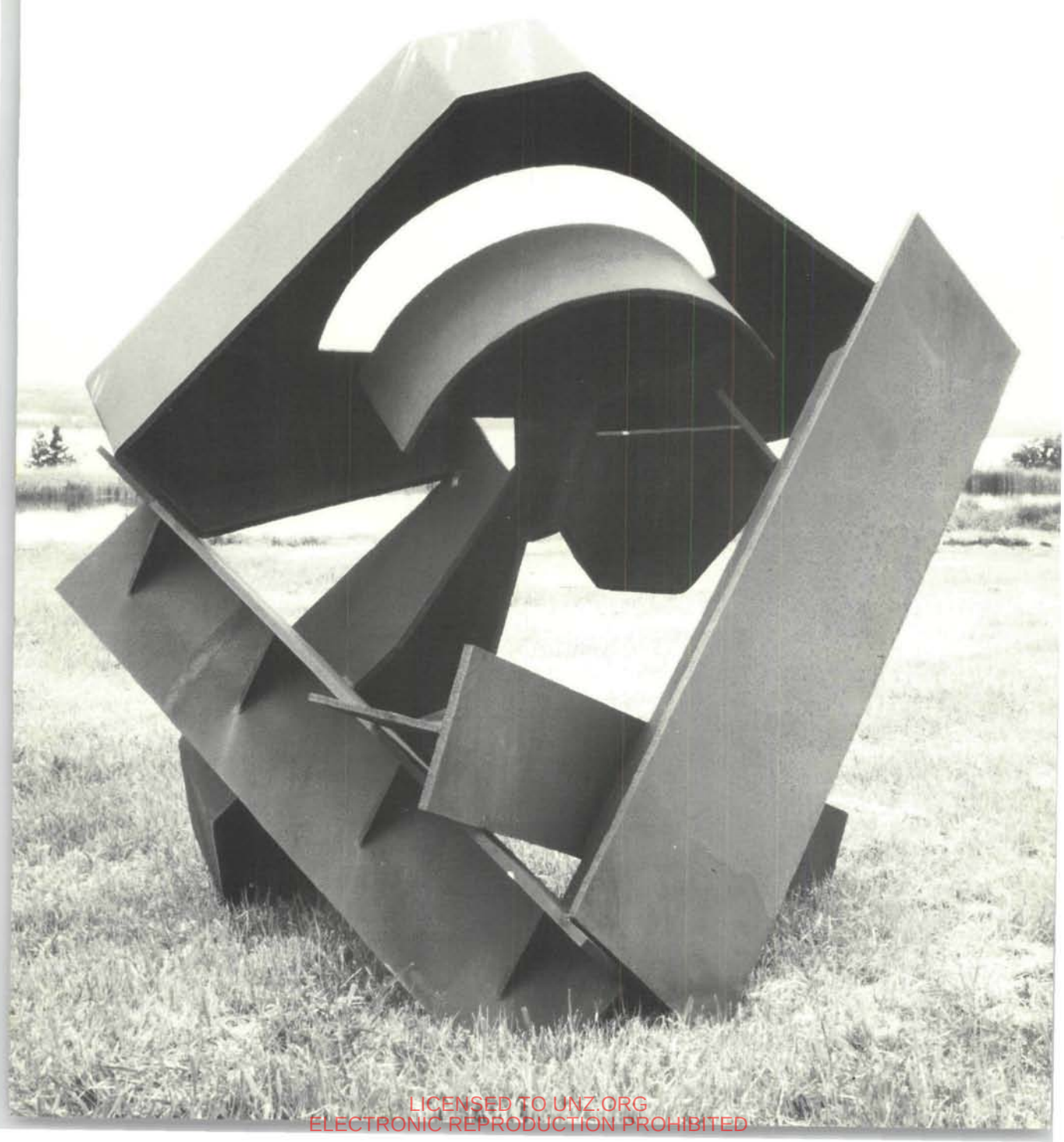

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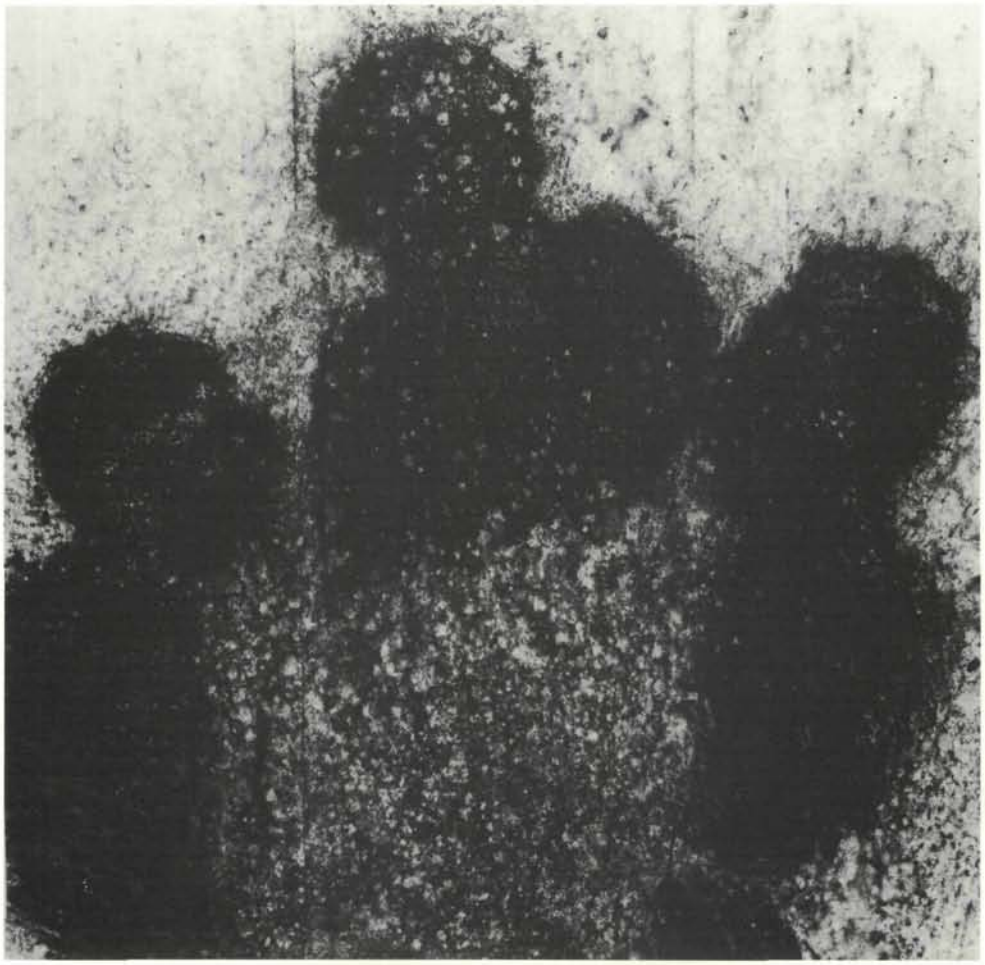

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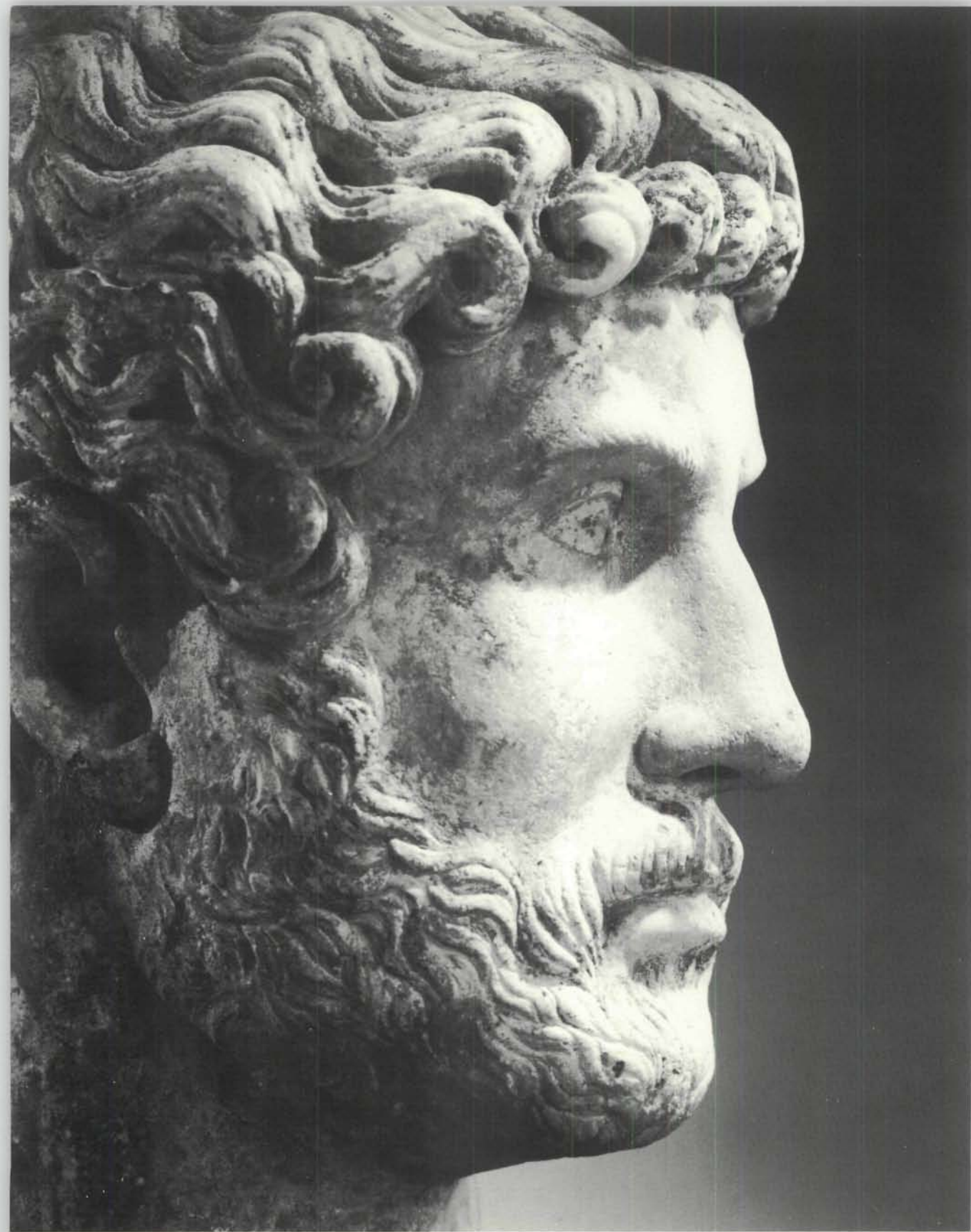

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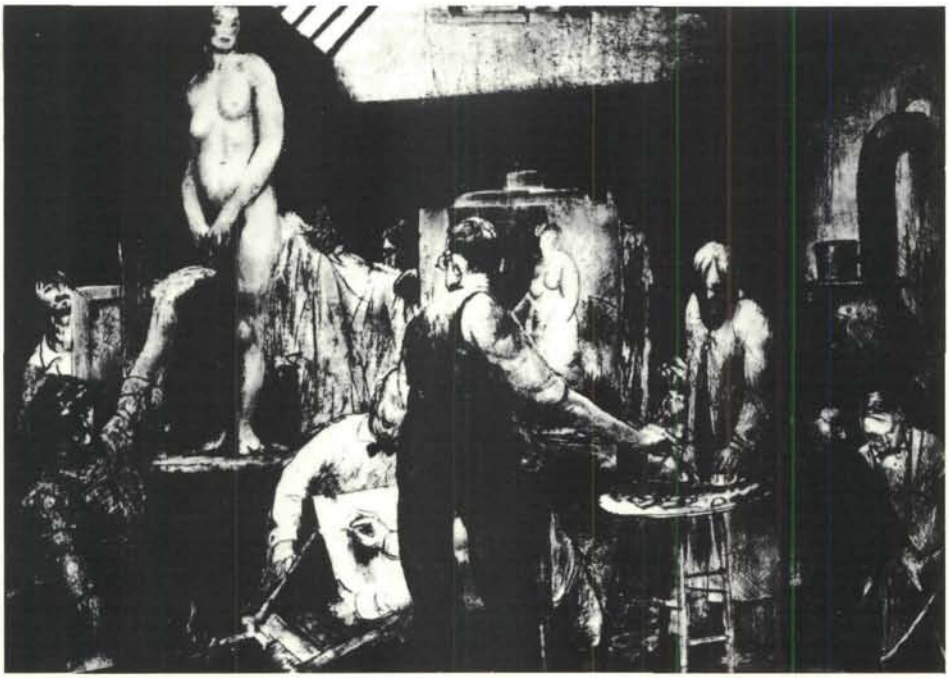

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Thinking about "Witness"

by Hilton Kramer

Almost all of the prophecies of Marx and his followers have already proved to be false, but this does not disturb the spiritual certainty of the faithful, any more than it did in the case of chiliastic sects: for it is a certainty not based on any empirical premises or supposed "historical laws," but simply on the psychological need for certainty. In this sense Marxism performs the function of a religion, and its efficacy is of a religious character. But it is a caricature and a bogus form of religion, since it presents its temporal eschatology as a scientific system, which religious mythologies do not purport to be.

—Leszek Kolakowski, in *Main Currents of Marxism,* Volume III

At this distance in time the mentality of the Communist-oriented intelligentsia of the Thirties and Forties must strain the comprehension even of those who, having observed it at first hand, now look back upon it, let alone of those who learn about it from such historical accounts of it as have been written. That mentality was presided over by an impassioned longing to believe.

—Lionel Trilling, in the Introduction to *The Middle of the Journey*

Human societies, like human beings, live by faith and die when faith dies . . . . Economics is not the central problem of this century. It is a relative problem which can be solved in relative ways. Faith is the central problem of this age.

—Whittaker Chambers, in *Witness*

The publication, late last year, of a new paperback edition of Whittaker Chambers's *Witness*[1] did not, so far as I am aware, cause even the smallest ripple of attention to be paid to this important book. This should not have come as a surprise to anyone. Although *Witness*—a stout volume of some eight hundred pages—was hailed as an event of immense consequence upon its original publication in 1952, the book has in recent decades virtually disappeared from our historical consciousness. It is rare—in my experience, anyway—to meet anyone under the age of forty who has actually read it.

The book has never been without its isolated devotees, to be sure, but these have tended to be readers with special interests—either in the history of the radical movement or in the literature of anti-Communism or in the vicissitudes of the Soviet espionage apparatus, about all of which, of course, *Witness* has much to tell us. But as a work of more general interest for readers who make a point of keeping themselves informed about the political and cultural world they inhabit—and most particularly, as literature of "a high order," which is how John P. Marquand described it in 1952—*Witness* was long ago consigned to oblivion. The critics never speak of it, the writers of the Eighties have never heard of it, and the older

1 *Witness,* by Whittaker Chambers. Preface by Robert Novak. Foreword by Milton Hindus. Regnery Gateway, 808 pages, $11.95 (paperback).

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generation—with certain honorable exceptions—has been content to leave its obscurity undisturbed. One can hardly imagine a professor anywhere assigning it to a class as required reading even in a period when the study of autobiography has come to enjoy something of a vogue on American campuses. Yet the truth about *Witness* is that it *is* one of the classic American autobiographies, and at the time of its publication it was clearly seen to be one even by many of the critics who found much to disagree with in its author's political views.

Since ours seems now to have become a chronically amnesiac culture, it may be worth recalling what the nature of this critical reception was in 1952. And the first and most fundamental thing to be recalled, I suppose, is the great uproar that the publication of *Witness* created not only on the political scene—where Chambers's role in the Alger Hiss case could be expected to generate enormous interest in anything he might write about this fateful event in our history—but in the world of literary and intellectual debate as well. That was, as a matter of fact, the world—or one of the worlds—that Chambers had come from. Long before the Hiss case came to dominate the nation's headlines and insinuate itself into the political life of the 1950s, Chambers had been known to virtually everyone on the literary Left as a familiar and problematic figure. In the early Thirties he had been—albeit briefly—one of the literary stars of *The New Masses.* In more recent years he had become a controversial figure at *Time* magazine, first as a book reviewer and then as a senior editor, and a well-known contributor to *Life.* His long sojourn in the Communist Party "underground" seems to have been an open secret to many of his former associates on the literary Left. Most of them knew nothing very specific about what his Party work actually entailed, of course, but they knew it was clandestine—and they also knew that the Party served the interests of the Soviet Union. Neither in his Party days nor during his tenure at *Time* was Chambers universally admired among those who knew or knew about him. But he seems always to have had something of an aura—to have been a man with a talent for commanding attention, causing uneasiness, and dividing opinion. It was, in any case, to his friendships in the literary world, where his skills as a writer and translator were known to be considerable, that he owed his survival when he made his decision to break with the Party, and it was through one of those friendships that he got his job at *Time.*

Given this history, it was inevitable that Chambers and his views would become a hotly debated issue in the literary-intellectual world when, in 1948, he found himself in the political limelight as Hiss's accuser. Indeed, owing to the use that Lionel Trilling made of Chambers in creating the character of Gifford Maxim in his novel *The Middle of the Journey,* he had become an issue—though a much smaller one—even in advance of the Hiss case. For Trilling's novel was published in 1947, and anyone who read and really understood *The Middle of the Journey* at that time was more or less prepared for much of what followed when, a few months later, Chambers named Hiss as an underground Communist before the House Un-American Activities Committee. In the somewhat sour critical reception accorded Trilling's novel, we can now see that we were given a polite preview of the far more noisy, hostile, and indeed vicious press that Chambers received when he began his long ordeal of public testimony against Hiss and the Party apparatus they had both served so efficiently.

By the time he came to write *Witness,* in the immediate aftermath of Hiss's conviction on two counts of perjury, Chambers had ample reason to know that one of his worst fears had been realized. He knew that as far as liberal opinion was concerned—and in the literary and publishing world at least, it was liberal opinion that dominated all discussion—Hiss, though sent to jail for criminal acts that publicly identified him as a Soviet espionage agent, was firmly established as a political martyr, whereas Chambers, who had risked his hard-won career

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and indeed his life by exposing a Soviet spy network at the very heart of the Washington bureaucracy, stood condemned as a turncoat and a villain. In the court of liberal opinion, informing on a fellow conspirator was deemed to be a far greater crime than belonging to a clandestine Communist spy apparatus and stealing government documents for a foreign power.

Thus, in the crazy logic of the case, Hiss—convicted of crimes that showed him to be a liar, a thief, and a traitor—was judged to be innocent even if guilty, and Chambers—the self-confessed renegade who recanted his treachery—was judged to be guilty even if he was telling the truth. For what mattered to liberal opinion was that Hiss was seen to have remained true to his ideals—never mind what the content of these "ideals" proved to be—whereas Chambers was seen to have betrayed them. (It was on this note that Alistair Cooke concluded his hastily written but very influential book on the case—*A Generation on Trial*—in 1950.) Exactly why Chambers had chosen to do this was never clearly established in the frightful campaign of vilification that was mounted against him. Was he simply a liar? But in two trials, in which Hiss was represented by some of the most illustrious legal talent in the country, twenty out of twenty-four jurors believed that Chambers spoke the truth about Hiss. Was Chambers then an opportunist? But his action against Hiss cost Chambers his job at *Time* and brought the prospect of ruin for him and his family. Was he a psychopath and a forger, as Hiss continued to claim? But the repeated attempts of the Hiss defense attorneys to make those charges stick always turned to ashes. Yet none of this counted against Hiss—except with the jurors, of course. Whatever the court decreed, liberal opinion had rendered its own irreversible verdict in the case: Chambers, whatever his motives, was found to be a monster, whereas Hiss—whatever his actions—was a man who had been wronged. In 1988, as we approach the fortieth anniversary of Chambers's historic testimony before the House Un-American Activities Committee, the evidence against Hiss is even more definitive than it was in the perjury trials—it has been especially so since the publication of Allen Weinstein's *Perjury: The Hiss-Chambers Case* in 1978—yet liberal opinion has not been significantly altered in the interim. Which is the main reason, of course, why *Witness* has remained a buried classic.

It has to be remembered, then, that even before the publication of *Witness,* Chambers had emerged as a despised, emblematic figure—the archetypal ex-Communist and counter-revolutionary who was not to be trusted, who was to be feared in fact, even when he *was* telling the truth, and most to be feared, perhaps, when it was no longer possible to deny that he was telling the truth. No doubt there are many reasons that could be adduced to explain this strange situation, and not the least of them was Chambers's own personality. Philip Rahv, who knew him in the early Thirties before Chambers went into the underground, noted that there was "something in his talk and manner, a vibration, an accent, that I can only describe as Dostoevskyean in essence."

> I thought at the time [Rahv wrote] that he was far from unconscious of the effect he produced. He had the air of a man who took more pleasure in the stylized than in the natural qualities of his personality. Still, whether aware or not, it was distinctly the Dostoevskyean note that he struck—that peculiar note of personal intensity and spiritual truculence, of commitment to the "Idea" so absolute as to suggest that life had no meaning apart from it, all oddly combined with a flair for mystification and melodrama.[2]

Lionel Trilling had met Chambers even earlier—in 1924-25, when Trilling was a senior at Columbia and Chambers, also at Columbia, had just joined the Communist Party. According to Trilling, they had never

2 "The Sense and Nonsense of Whittaker Chambers," by Philip Rahv; *Partisan Review,* July-August 1952.

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been friends, but they had friends in common—"young men of intimidating brilliance"—and, as Trilling later reported, "I observed [Chambers] as if from a distance and with considerable irony, yet accorded him the deference which my friends thought his due." When, toward the end of his life, Trilling came to write a new introduction for the re-issue of *The Middle of the Journey,* he gave us a very vivid account of what the basis of that "deference" had been. It was not only that "Chambers had a very considerable college prestige as a writer," and, as Trilling added, that "this was deserved." There was the man himself.

> The moral force that Chambers asserted [Trilling wrote] began with his physical appearance. This seemed calculated to negate youth and all its graces, to deny that they could be of any worth in our world of pain and injustice. He was short of stature and very broad, with heavy arms and massive thighs; his sport was wrestling . . . . His eyes were narrow and they preferred to consult the floor rather than an interlocutor's face. His mouth was small and, like his eyes, tended downward, one might think in sullenness, though this was not so. When the mouth opened, it never failed to shock by reason of the dental ruin it disclosed, a devastation of empty sockets and blackened stumps . . . . [T]hat desolated mouth was the perfect insigne of Chambers' moral authority. It annihilated the hygienic American present—only a serf could have such a mouth, or some student in a visored cap who sat in his Moscow garret and thought of nothing save the moment when he would toss the fatal canister into the barouche of the Grand Duke.
>
> Chambers could on occasion speak eloquently and cogently, but he was not much given to speaking—his histrionism, which seemed unremitting, was chiefly that of imperturbability and long silences. Usually his utterances were gnomic, often cryptic. Gentleness was not cut out of the range of his expression, which might even include a compassionate sweetness of a beguiling kind. But the chief impression he made was of a forbidding drabness.[3]

In later life, however much Chambers may have changed in other respects, all of the characteristic qualities observed by Rahv and Trilling (and many others) became even more marked in the personality and appearance of this complicated figure. They led many of his associates—including, it is said, the Hisses—to believe that he might be "foreign," maybe even Russian. The fact that he spoke several languages, and even seemed to speak English with an "accent," also contributed to the impression that he was somehow not an American, though in fact he was born in Philadelphia and grew up on Long Island. The Dostoevskyean note became, if anything, an even more ingrained element of Chambers's outlook and manner of utterance as he grew older. The forbidding drabness, too, the unremitting histrionism, the imperturbability and long silences, as well as the eloquence and beguiling sweetness—all came to be remarked upon, though they inspired differing responses in different quarters, by the friends and the enemies who came to know Chambers as an editor of *Time,* as a figure in the Hiss case, as the author of *Witness,* and in the years that remained to him after the publication of *Witness* when, among other things, he was involved in the early development of *National Review.*

In the matter of appearances, at least, Chambers himself was acutely aware of the fact that he was woefully miscast for the

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3 The edition of *The Middle of the Journey* with Trilling's new introduction was published by Charles Scribner's Sons in 1976. It should be said that Trilling clearly disliked Chambers and came to dislike his writing, too. Yet at the time of the Hiss case, Trilling supported Chambers and exhibited remarkable courage in doing so. Approached by one of Hiss's lawyers who, as Trilling wrote, "tried to induce me to speak against [Chambers] in court," he not only refused but shocked this attorney by asserting that "Whittaker Chambers is a man of honor." He could still recall, Trilling wrote, "the outburst of contemptuous rage [my remarks] evoked from the lawyer who had come to call on me to solicit my testimony."

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hero's role in the Hiss case, and he was not without a certain grim humor on the subject. "You know what the trouble with this case is?" he once asked Bennett Cerf, the publisher of *Witness*. And he answered:

> We're cast wrong. I look like a slob, so I should be the villain. Hiss, the handsome man who knows all the society people, is the born hero. It's bad casting. If it was the other way around, nobody would pay any attention to the story; but because of the way we look, all of you people think he must be telling the truth. That's what has made him so valuable to the other side.[4]

But as Chambers well understood, it was more than a matter of appearances, of "bad casting," however much appearances—and indeed, his own problematic personality—may have contributed to the overall atmosphere of hostility and suspicion. There was a whole view of the universe at stake in the belief that had been vested in Hiss's innocence, and it was because of the force with which Chambers placed *that* issue at the center of *Witness* that the book caused the furor that it did. For *Witness* fundamentally altered the terms of the political and intellectual debate that had been raging within the liberal camp at least since the Moscow Trials in the Thirties: the debate about the relation in which liberalism stood not only to Communism and Stalinism but to socialism and other modalities of Marxist and "progressive" thought.

That debate—essentially a debate among disabused liberals over the future of liberalism—had reached what seemed to many a kind of watershed in the fierce divisions and acrimonious quarrels caused by the Hiss case and the other revelations of spying, treason, and disloyalty in the late Forties and early Fifties. The "innocent" liberalism of the Thirties was now seen to be hopelessly compromised by its inability (or refusal) to resist the corruptions of Communist influence. Something else—a "new" liberalism—was needed to take its place. Liberals had entered upon a vast effort to set their own intellectual house in order, and it was proving to be a formidable task.

Liberalism, it turned out, was not to be so easily dislodged from the whole morass of illiberal doctrines and beliefs in which, under the influence of Marxism, it had become so deeply embedded, and every attempt to effect such a separation raised the question of whether, in what survived this process of political surgery, there was still something that could legitimately be called liberalism. Over the whole of this worthy enterprise, moreover, there hovered a great fear—the fear of being thought "reactionary," the fear of being relegated to the Right. Even the most disabused liberals believed in their hearts that they still belonged to the Left. The very thought of being accused of collaborating with "reaction," as it was still called, was a liberal nightmare, and there was no shortage of Stalinist liberals (as I believe they must be called) to bring the charge of "reaction"—which might mean anything from outright fascism to perfectly respectable political opposition to certain New Deal initiatives—at every infraction, or suspected infraction, of "progressive" doctrine.

Among the revisionist liberals I speak of, conservatism in this period did not loom as a viable alternative. This was the period, after all, in which Lionel Trilling, in his Preface to *The Liberal Imagination* (1950), famously observed that "In the United States at this time liberalism is not only the dominant but even the sole intellectual tradition."

> For it is the plain fact [Trilling continued] that nowadays there are no conservative or reactionary ideas in general circulation. This does not mean, of course, that there is no impulse to conservatism or to reaction. Such impulses are certainly very strong, perhaps even stronger than most of us know. But the conservative

4 Bennett Cerf, in *At Random,* published by Random House in 1977. In this memoir Cerf, who considered himself a liberal (and was), tells the story of how he came to publish—and believe in—*Witness.*

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> impulse and the reactionary impulse do not, with some isolated and some ecclesiastical exceptions, express themselves in ideas but only in action or in irritable mental gestures which seek to resemble ideas.[5]

In the same year that *The Liberal Imagination* appeared, Diana Trilling published an important essay called "A Memorandum on the Hiss Case" in *Partisan Review,* which was one of the principal journals—the others were *Commentary* and *The New Leader*—in which the revisionist liberal debate was conducted. Of the several significant points that Mrs. Trilling was concerned to make in this essay, the following now seem especially notable both in themselves and for the light they cast on the reception of *Witness* (whose publication still lay two years into the future).

1. Of the duties that now devolved upon anyone who, as Mrs. Trilling wrote, "thinks Hiss guilty but would still think of himself as a liberal," the first, she argued, was "that he separate himself from his undesirable allies." She was quite specific about what this meant.

> In the Hiss case, [the] enforced alignment between anti-Communist liberals and reactionaries is particularly open and distasteful [she wrote]. Who brought Hiss's perfidy to public issue, except the one agency in Washington most suspect for its political motive, the un-American Activities Committee? What is the anti-Hiss press, except the usual rabble-rousers and Red-baiters? What party has most to gain from his conviction, except the Republican Party, and the Republican Party in its most retrograde wing? It is scarcely an attractive company, and the liberal must make a clean break with it.

In this respect, it is worth noting that Mrs. Trilling's essay was, in part, a review of *Seeds of Treason* by Ralph de Toledano and Victor Lasky, who were certainly writing from the Right, and not of *A Generation on Trial* by Alistair Cooke, who was writing from the liberal Left. Mrs. Trilling left her readers in no doubt that she was appalled to find that de Toledano and Lasky regarded Chambers as "a hero of our times, a martyr to principle and to the security of the nation," and she condemned such a judgment as "an unthoughtful and dangerous attitude."

2. About the relation that had obtained between liberalism and Communism, Mrs. Trilling was perfectly clear and properly troubled, and she well understood that the challenge of separating the liberals from their disbelief in Communism's malevolent character would be immense. "But the task of persuading the liberal who is not afraid of Communism," she wrote, "that he should be afraid of it is a gigantic one, and one which involves changing a climate of opinion and feeling over the whole of our culture." Yes, we might add, and the task is no less gigantic in 1988, alas, than it was in 1950. The great difference, of course, is that in 1988 there are no Trillingesque liberals left to aid in the task.

3. Then there was the reflection that Mrs. Trilling offered on the source of the "idealism" that Hiss was believed by so many to have represented.

> If we can say, as I think we can, that before this century the source of all political idealism was (however remotely) religion, I think we can also say that in our own century the source of all political idealism has been socialism, and, since the Russian Revolution, specifically the socialism of the Soviet Union. I do not mean that whoever has worked for political progress has necessarily been a socialist. I mean only that it has been from socialist theory that political progress has chiefly taken its inspiration, and from socialist example its practice.[6]

5 *The Liberal Imagination* was published by The Viking Press in 1950. Since he believed himself, with just reason, to be writing as a liberal, Trilling was said to have been considerably shaken when Joseph Frank wrote an article in *The Sewanee Review,* in 1956, entitled "Lionel Trilling and the Conservative Imagination." The article was occasioned by the publication of Trilling's *The Opposing Self.*

6 "A Memorandum on the Hiss Case," by Diana Trilling, *Partisan Review,* May-June 1950.

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What Mrs. Trilling wrote in this passage is largely true, but what is striking about it in retrospect, and especially in relation to *Witness,* is its bland, untroubled acceptance of the momentous event it speaks of. Socialism had indeed supplanted religion as the source of "political idealism," and from that fateful shift there had flowed many of the horrors of the modern age. This was to be one of the philosophical issues that Chambers placed at the center of *Witness,* and it had already served, on a more modest scale, as a key element in Lionel Trilling's portrayal of Gifford Maxim in *The Middle of the Journey.* Yet in her "Memorandum on the Hiss Case," Mrs. Trilling did not pause to consider its implications. It clearly did not impress her as a subject that needed to be addressed on that occasion. It might even have seemed that, in addressing it, she would have been in danger of appearing to have something in common with "undesirable allies." She turned instead to a criticism of President Roosevelt for his failure "to see the reality of the Red threat and its menace to democracy."

Mrs. Trilling then went on to express the hope "that if this case is to serve any purpose in our lives there must be salvaged from it a better notion of liberalism." One of the things this meant, she insisted, was that "The case will have been useful, I think, if it helps us to detach the wagon of American liberalism from the star of the Soviet Union . . . ." In what ways the wagon of American liberalism remained firmly attached to the idea of socialism, however, and what *that* meant, was nowhere discussed. It obviously did not occur to Mrs. Trilling—or to the anti-Communist liberals who shared her views—that if socialism remained the source of "political idealism," then liberalism itself might be doomed.

This, I believe, is what we have seen happen in the decades since Mrs. Trilling wrote her essay: liberalism—in substance, if not in name—has, in our political institutions, our governmental policies, and in what Mrs. Trilling called the "climate of opinion and feeling over the whole of our culture," ceded more and more ground to the kind of political outlook that is anchored in the socialist vision. You can observe the results in our universities, you can see it in the media, you can hear it in the speeches of the Democrats who run the Congress and who are running for the Presidency. In many respects it is now the liberal impulse that expresses itself "only in action and in irritable mental gestures which seek to resemble ideas," for as an intellectual tradition liberalism is bankrupt. Liberalism dares not openly acknowledge, even to itself, its surrender to socialist ideology, for everybody knows that the American voter will not elect a frankly socialist government. And so the rhetoric of liberalism, no matter how threadbare and transparent, must be continually repaired and refurbished and made re-usable until the prize can be won.

I have focused on Mrs. Trilling's essay because it encapsulates so many of the ideas and so many of the fears that characterized the most enlightened liberal minds of her generation—those that came to be identified as liberal anti-Communists. It was that sector of the liberal community—staunch in its opposition to Communism and very knowing not only about its underground operations but about the spell it had cast over the whole of our culture—that played a crucial role in the critical reception of *Witness.*

The intellectual uproar over *Witness* occurred on two principal fronts. It was to be expected that the "progressive" Left—those still under the sway of Stalinism and the Popular Front mentality—would attempt to bury the book with the same vicious methods that had been employed in the campaign to discredit Chambers's testimony and render Chambers himself a moral leper. (The term "leper" was actually used in court by Hiss's most celebrated defense counsel, Lloyd Paul Stryker, one of the famous liberals of his day.) As Chambers wrote in *Witness*: "This personal assault upon me was the only real defense that Alger Hiss and his supporters ever developed," and the assault was renewed with added venom when his book was published. If, in the short run, this effort on the part

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of the orthodox Left failed to impede the immediate success of *Witness*—it was a Book-of-the-Month Club selection and a big best-seller in its day—the long-run effect was nonetheless to keep the book from having much of a literary afterlife. In the world of *The New Yorker,* which was solidly pro-Hiss,[7] *The New Republic,* whose editor in those days was subsequently revealed to have been a member, earlier on, of another underground Soviet apparatus,[8] and other such staunch liberal journals, the barriers were erected and Chambers was stripped of his literary standing.

The response of the liberal anti-Communists to *Witness* was very different—and far more honorable, of course—yet the effect was also in the end to place Chambers outside the boundaries of enlightened intellectual opinion. Because they believed that Chambers was telling the truth about Hiss—and indeed about Communism—it became the primary task of the liberal anti-Communists in dealing with *Witness* not to defend Hiss but to rescue liberalism from Chambers's sweeping attack on it. And because they recognized that the author of *Witness* was, as even Philip Rahv acknowledged, a "born writer" and that the book itself was, as Bennett Cerf said, "superbly written," the liberal anti-Communists were concerned, above all, not to challenge Chambers's literary gifts but to diminish the impact which his powerful testament might have on the political and moral status of liberalism. The whole effort of the liberal anti-Communists in regard to *Witness* thus became an exercise in what we would now call damage control.

Rereading the criticisms of *Witness* that were written by some of the outstanding liberal anti-Communists of the early Fifties, what is particularly remarkable in retrospect is the way they managed to combine a genuine admiration for Chambers's achievement with a fundamental rejection of his views. Take, for example, the review-article written by Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., in the *Saturday Review.* Schlesinger was full of praise for *Witness* as a contribution to American literature:

> Whittaker Chambers has written one of the really significant American autobiographies. When some future Plutarch writes his American Lives, he will find in Chambers penetrating and terrible insights into America in the early twentieth century. Nor need he search long for a parallel life; just as Henry L. Stimson's "On Active Service" is the powerful counterstatement to Henry Adams's "Education," so Whittaker Chambers's "Witness" is the counterstatement to that book so influential twenty years ago, the "Autobiography of Lincoln Steffens."

Nothing could have been better calculated to impress upon the readers of the *Saturday Review* the idea that *Witness* was a book of immense importance than to have placed Chambers in the company of Adams, Stimson, and Steffens at that particular moment in history. But there was more:

> In part, "Witness" is an extraordinary personal document—a powerful and compassionate story of a middle-class family broken on the shoals of life in middle-class America, until the surviving son rejects his class and enlists in the ranks of the proletarian revolution. But, like the other great autobiographies, "Witness" is much more than a personal document. It is also a political document and a philosophical document. Its weight and urgency as a personal document are likely to win acceptance for its politics and its philosophy. But the politics and the philosophy, in my judgment, raise basic issues which deserve independent and critical examination.

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7 A. J. Liebling, *The New Yorker*'s celebrated press columnist, served as an unpaid volunteer for the Hiss defense while pretending to write about the case as an objective reporter. See Allen Weinstein's account of this unlovely episode in *Perjury* (Alfred A. Knopf, 1978), pages 166-167.

8 I refer to Michael Straight. His later role in identifying Anthony Blunt as a Soviet spy is described in *Conspiracy of Silence: The Secret Life of Anthony Blunt,* by Barrie Penrose and Simon Freeman (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1987).

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Schlesinger then went on to belittle the role that espionage and Communist influence might have played in American foreign policy in the Roosevelt era and, what was even more important in his view, to defend the New Deal against the harsh and categorical criticisms that Chambers had made of it in *Witness*.[9]

This was no surprise, of course. Schlesinger was writing less as a disinterested historian than as a partisan of the Democratic Party and a pillar of the "new" liberalism, and it was impossible—philosophically as well as politically impossible—for any champion of the New Deal who also aspired to a position of influence in the Democratic Party to accord any real importance either to Chambers's charges of Communist influence or to his strictures on the vast changes that the Roosevelt administration has brought to the governing of the nation.[10] Given this disposition to reject and condemn Chambers's political analysis on partisan as well as philosophical grounds, it must also be noted that in those days liberals like Schlesinger conducted this debate in a rather higher-minded intellectual style than was later to be the case. There hadn't yet occurred that coarsening and softening of the mind that has been so evident in Schlesinger's writings—and not his alone, alas—since the emergence of the Kennedy machine in the Sixties.

Another important review of *Witness* by a leading liberal anti-Communist was Sidney Hook's in *The New York Times Book Review*. This, too, described Chambers's book as "one of the most significant autobiographies of the twentieth century."

> It is not among the hundred great books [Hook wrote]. Yet it throws more light on the conspiratorial and religious character of modern communism, on the tangled complex of motives which led men and women of goodwill to immolate themselves on the altars of a fancied historical necessity, than all of the hundred great books of the past combined . . . . [*Witness*] contains interesting vignettes of the Communist movement, a record of religious conversion, the saga of a farm, an account of desperate courage alternating with moods of spiritual despair—all knit together by the essentially mystical and romantic personality of the author . . . . The literary quality of the writing is impressive.

Hook also said of *Witness* that "this book, even more than the verdict of the [Hiss] trials, may well be called the vindication of Whittaker Chambers."

> Its pages [he continued] show that [Chambers] has long since atoned for his own complicity in conspiratorial work by his suffering at the hands of Hiss' friends whose outrageous smears against his personal life and that of his wife surpassed in virulence anything known in recent American history.

Still, Hook too was adamant in voicing the most categorical rejection of Chambers's political and philosophical interpretation of his own experience. About the New Deal, in Hook's case, there was plenty of political sympathy but no partisan defense—he wasn't

9 "Whittaker Chambers & His 'Witness,'" by Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., *Saturday Review*, May 24, 1952.

10 The appalling record of the Roosevelt administration in dealing with charges of Communist influence and spying is still almost unbelievable. In the immediate aftermath of the Hitler-Stalin pact in 1939, Chambers had taken his information about Hiss and other Soviet spies to Adolf A. Berle, who is described in a new book—*Liberal: Adolf A. Berle and the Vision of an American Era* by Jordan A. Schwarz (The Free Press, 1987)—as the man "who then administered State Department intelligence." "For reasons he never felt he needed to give," writes Schwarz, "Berle did nothing with Chambers' information until he turned it over to the FBI in 1941 for an investigation of Chambers' charges. While Chambers' list surfaced in the State Department in 1943 again, nothing was done until Chambers showed up once more in 1948 to repeat his charges to the House Committee on Un-American Activities." Berle regarded the whole subject, according to Schwarz, as "not really important."

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writing with a view to an appointment in some future Democratic administration. Yet the best explanation that Hook could come up with to explain how it had happened that the Communists had had such a free ride in the Roosevelt administration—in *Witness,* Chambers quotes J. Peters, his boss in the Soviet spy apparatus, as saying that "Even in Germany under the Weimar Republic, the party did not have what we have here"—was not very persuasive. "Most of Chambers' facts are rendered intelligible by a less sinister hypothesis than the one he offers," Hook wrote."It is that stupidity is sometimes the greatest of all historical forces."[11] Now, stupidity certainly played its part in this story; it usually does in human affairs. But to elevate it to the status of one of "the greatest of all historical forces" as a way of accounting for the New Deal's failure to take the Communist issue seriously is tantamount to abandoning the whole question. Mrs. Trilling's analysis of the relation in which the New Deal liberals stood to the kind of Communist "idealism" which Hiss represented had at least the merit of placing the question firmly in the realm of political reality.

What bothered Hook the most about *Witness,* of course, were its author's religious views. These he condemned in toto, declaring that "It is not unlikely that the [secular] humanistic spirit may be the best defense on a world scale against the Communist crusade because it can unite all human beings who, despite their religious differences about first and last things, value truth, justice, kindness and freedom among men." Now, over a third of a century later, I think it would be accurate to say that the "spirit" so fondly invoked by Sidney Hook in his review of *Witness* has not proven to be much of a defense at all. However problematic Chambers's religious views may still be for those readers of *Witness* who are non-believers, he wasn't wrong in his diagnosis that "Faith is the central problem of this age." The liberal mind, so comfortable in its own articles of faith, shied away from such an idea, as if from the most dreaded of heresies, and went merrily to its doom in the Sixties when that "impassioned longing to believe," which Lionel Trilling spoke of as the presiding impulse of the Thirties and Forties, reasserted itself in even more virulent forms and with more lasting consequences.

History, as a matter of fact, has proved Whittaker Chambers to have been right about many things, and *Witness* remains not only one of the few indispensable autobiographies ever written by an American—and one of the best written, too—but the very thing that Sidney Hook said it wasn't: "an intelligent guide" to the victory of freedom over Communist tyranny. It is the only great book on the Communist experience to have been written by an American, and it deserves to be recognized as a first-class achievement. Yet there is no reason to believe that this new edition of so important a book will succeed in winning the readers or in exerting the influence it should have. On the contrary, over the whole of our cultural and intellectual life today there reigns an atmosphere that is deeply inimical not only to Chambers's ideas but to his moral gravity—the sense he had that it was not only our political future but our whole civilization that was at stake in the momentous issues he lived through and wrote about so eloquently. Forty years after he brought his first public charges against Alger Hiss, Chambers remains in the liberal mind—which is more than ever the mind that dominates the universities, the media, and the literary world—the monster that Hiss's defenders shamelessly made him out to be. And he remains, too, a writer denied his proper literary standing. And Hiss? Well, among other things, he has been given the distinction of having an academic chair named in his honor at Bard College—a chair in, of all things, the humanities. And as far as I know, it hasn't been funded by the KGB, either. It is, I suppose, supported by that same brand of "idealism" that inspired Alger Hiss. *Plus ça change . . .*

11 "The Faiths of Whittaker Chambers," by Sidney Hook, *The New York Times Book Review,* May 25, 1952.

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"Voices and Visions" on PBS

by Bruce Bawer

Thirty-five years have passed since Randall Jarrell complained, in the lead essay of his book *Poetry and the Age,* about the indifference of the American public toward the American poet, and it is safe, I think, to say that the situation has not changed appreciably since. Indeed, for all the poetry workshops and little magazines that have proliferated in the intervening decades, Americans have, if anything, grown steadily more uninterested in poetry. This lack of interest is particularly discernible on the part of college students. To be sure, many of these students are eager to *write* poetry—which to them typically means pouring their passions, resentments, and idle thoughts onto the page in whatever words happen to pop into their minds—but few of them have much interest in reading the stuff. And why should they? Outside of the classroom, they've never seen a poem, never seen anybody read one, never heard anybody discuss one. They've grown up in an age all too many of whose cultural arbiters and institutions categorically refuse to distinguish between high art and pop culture, and so it has never been made clear to them that by ignoring poetry they might be causing themselves to miss something important. For many of them, as it happens, the art form of choice is the music video, which requires nothing of them beyond the willingness to set their minds on neutral and gaze passively at a series of diverting images for three or four minutes at a stretch.

So it is that the college teacher of poetry has his work cut out for him. Poetry, after all, demands many attributes to whose development a habitual indulgence in music videos and the like is patently inimical: patience, discipline, a sense of form, an ability to detect subtle nuances of thought and feeling, a sensitivity to language. The only way for a teacher to help such students to understand poetry is, simply enough, to have them read poetry—and read it again, and again, and talk about it, and memorize a great deal of it. A teacher must make it clear to his students that poetry exists in an utterly different sphere from rock music and TV shows, that poetry is generally much harder to "get" than rock music and TV shows, that one must approach poetry through a different (and perhaps previously underused) part of the mind than that with which one approaches these entertainments, and that the cultivation of an appreciation for poetry can take a considerable amount of time.

Certainly the last thing that one would want to bring into a poetry class is a television set. To introduce a television set into a room full of college students—students for whom one is trying to make extended concentration upon literary texts an easier and more natural activity—would be rather like bringing a six-pack to an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting. Yet that, figuratively speaking, is precisely what the Public Broadcasting System is eager for America's college English teachers to do. For the network has

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put together a thirteen-part television series on American poetry which—though the rest of us are more than welcome to watch—has patently been manufactured with a huge, captive college-student audience in mind.

Indeed, *Voices and Visions*—for such is the title of the series, each of whose episodes covers the career of a different American poet, from Whitman to Sylvia Plath—is described throughout its reams of publicity materials as "a PBS television series and college credit course." The packagers have not missed an angle. To begin with, there is the series itself, which in addition to being aired around the country in thirteen weekly one-hour installments beginning in late January, can be ordered on tape from an outfit called "The Annenberg/CPB Project" for $29.95 per program, $350 the lot. Accompanying the series, moreover, is a large hardcover essay collection, *Voices and Visions: The Poet in America*, edited by Helen Vendler, published by Random House, and "recommended for advanced students."[1] Written by such big-name academic critics as Hugh Kenner, Marjorie Perloff, and Richard Poirier, the essays number thirteen in all, one for each poet covered by the series: Walt Whitman, Emily Dickinson, Robert Frost, Wallace Stevens, William Carlos Williams, Ezra Pound, Marianne Moore, T. S. Eliot, Hart Crane, Langston Hughes, Elizabeth Bishop, Robert Lowell, and Sylvia Plath. Also issued by Random House is a "text/anthology" entitled *Modern American Poets: Their Voices and Visions*, which contains "all the published poems featured in the programs" and is edited by Robert DiYanni. Then there's a "viewer's guide," published by the American Library Association, and a "student study guide," published by Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company. Finally, there's a toll-free number (1-800-LEARNER) designed to help us sort these various items out.

What it all adds up to is an elaborate package of come-ons, tie-ins, and handouts that any corporate sales division would envy. (One can only wonder why they're not putting out a set of *Voices and Visions* poet-dolls: a nine-inch-tall Marianne Moore, say, in a broad-brimmed hat, a William Carlos Williams in doctor whites with a tiny little stethoscope, and so on. Collect them all!) The credits are perhaps the most Byzantine that this writer has seen anywhere. The series as a whole is "produced by the New York Center for Visual History and presented by the South Carolina ETV Network." Its executive producer is Lawrence Pitkethly, a longtime journalist and filmmaker with the BBC—he was born in Northern Ireland—and a co-founder of the aforementioned Center, which the series' publicity materials describe as "a non-profit media center that produces innovative material on American culture." (Apparently, Mr. Pitkethly is himself the very first person to receive an "education" in American poetry from *Voices and Visions*; in an interview with *The New York Times*, he is quoted as saying that when he began work on the series, "I didn't know that much about American poetry. . . . I feel as though I got a $7.5 million education in American poetry—on a scholarship, at that.")

The series adviser is Helen Vendler, the Kenan Professor of English at Harvard University and poetry critic of *The New Yorker*, who has probably had a greater influence (or, at least, a more inimical influence) on critical thinking about contemporary American poetry than anyone else. Major funding for the series derives from the Annenberg/CPB Project (which offers "a variety of high quality educational programs for lifelong learning and for college credit") and the National Endowment for the Humanities; other funding derives from a variety of sources, including the National Endowment for the Arts, Great Britain's Channel Four, and a number of private foundations, corporations, and state cultural commissions. In addition, each episode has its own director, writer, and program consultant as well as its own sources of "special funding." "Langston Hughes: The Dream Keeper," for instance, was funded in part by Soft Sheen Products, Inc., and by the Ohio Humanities Council.

1 *Voices and Visions: The Poet in America*, edited by Helen Vendler; Random House, 528 pages, $29.95.

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(Similarly, "Robert Frost" was funded in part by the Vermont Council on the Humanities and Public Issues; New Jersey kicked in for favorite sons Whitman and Williams; and Ohio helped pay not only for the program on Hughes but for the episode devoted to his fellow Ohioan, Hart Crane.)

If I have gone into detail about such esoteric matters as credits and funding, it is partly because I find it remarkable that so many individuals and organizations have gone to such effort and expense to produce so misguided a series. Misguided, because the whole enterprise seems to me to be founded upon a gross misapprehension (on the part of some participants) and a willful disregard (on the part of others) of the nature of the poetic experience. What, after all, one must ask, is the purpose of *Voices and Visions*? If one telephones 1-800-LEARNER to find out, one's call will be answered by a tape recording on which a chillingly flat, dehumanized voice explains that one has reached the offices of the Annenberg/CPB Project, whose *Voices and Visions* series

> chronicles the collective achievements of American poets and their contributions to American poetry. The programs make poetry a visual experience by capturing the poets' ideas in striking images and photography. They create an appreciation of an important cultural heritage by bringing poetry to life as a dynamic art form. *Voices and Visions* illustrates poetry as an expression of common experiences and feelings. The programs enable the viewer to recognize how poems work, what poems mean, and how an individual poem relates to the larger literary tradition.

What sort of thinking is at work here? What sort of mentality takes for granted the wisdom of "capturing [a] poet's ideas in striking images and photography" and of "mak[ing] poetry a visual experience"? Was poetry not already alive, already "a dynamic art form," before Lawrence Pitkethly and company got their hands on it?

One hesitates to attribute major importance to a taped telephone message, but then this message is one of the only places in which those responsible for the series state explicitly what its purpose might be. The series itself never satisfies one's curiosity on this point: nor does Professor Vendler's "companion" book. The series' publicity materials, however, do (fleetingly) address this question. Somewhere in the pile of *Voices and Visions* publicity releases one finds these sentences: "The poetry [in *Voices and Visions*] is seen as well as heard through the television medium. On-screen text and animated words give the poems spirit and immediacy. Drama, dance, musical performance, interview segments, voice-over recitation, documentary, archival and location footage, and recordings of the poets reading their own work where possible are used to engage the viewer." Plainly, the same mentality is at work in this publicity release as in the Annenberg/CPB Project recording: poetry is something that needs the magic of television to give it "spirit and immediacy" and to make it "engage" an audience. To think this way about poetry, it seems to me, is to reduce a great poem to the status of a libretto, as it were, to an electronic operetta; if an audience is indeed "engaged" by such tampering, is that audience truly experiencing the poem or is it merely being entertained by a degraded high-tech adaptation?

Unquestionably, the answer is the latter. For though *Voices and Visions* is indeed occasionally informative and even diverting, the experience of watching it bears little resemblance to the experience of reading poetry. As a matter of fact, to watch the typical episode of this series—in which half a dozen or so poems (or excerpts) by a given poet are "presented," and his career summarized, his influences catalogued, and his themes and style discussed by various narrators, critics, and fellow poets—is rather like watching several hours' worth of MTV. The only difference is that instead of music videos we are offered "poetry videos." Like music videos, these take several forms. In some of them, a poem is dramatized; in others, a voice-over reading of a poem is accompanied by a series

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of atmospheric, often surrealistic, visual effects. Sometimes the words of the poem appear onscreen, sometimes not. The results of both approaches are generally little better than disastrous.

Take, for instance, the episode on Robert Frost, in which the poem "Home Burial," a dialogue between a husband and wife who have just buried their child, is presented as a brief drama, complete with background music. It begins as follows: a pensive young man enters his house, pauses at the foot of a staircase, looks up to see his wife on the upstairs landing, starts heavily up the stairs (*terrible* overacting, by the way), and finally, in a dreadfully flat voice (rather like that of the recording at Annenberg/CPB), delivers his first line: "What is it you see / From up there always—for I want to know." She doesn't reply. "What is it you see," he repeats. "I will find out now—you must tell me, dear." Finally he realizes what his wife is looking at:

> "The wonder is I didn't see at once.
> I never noticed it from here before.
> I must be wonted to it—that's the reason.
> The little graveyard where my people are!
> So small the window frames the whole of it.
> Not so much larger than a bedroom, it is?
> There are three stones of slate and one of marble,
> Broad-shouldered little slabs there in the sunlight
> On the sidehill. We haven't to mind *those.*
> But I understand: it is not the stones,
> But the child's mound—"

What a beautiful poem! And what a terrible idea to have these lousy actors turn it into a soap opera! The dramatization achieves the impossible: it makes "Home Burial" ludicrous. Why wasn't there anyone on hand to tell Lawrence Pitkethly the obvious—that this poem was never meant to be *acted,* that Frost's words sound awkward and unnatural coming out of the mouths of actors, that lyric poetry and drama (whether composed in prose or verse) are two drastically different things?

Such grotesquely inappropriate presentations of poems are more the rule than the exception in *Voices and Visions.* The poetry video for T. S. Eliot's "Preludes," for instance, shows a slatternly, half-undressed grisette sitting wordlessly on the edge of a bed in a grubby little flat and removing her stockings, while a barechested, unshaven young lout hovers over her; it might just as easily be the video for a new Cyndi Lauper song. Like "Home Burial," part of the "Game of Chess" section of *The Waste Land* is dramatized: two middle-aged women sit in a pub, one of them chattering away in the words of the poem ("When Lil's husband got demobbed, I said—/ I didn't mince my words, I said to her myself, / . . . / Now Albert's coming back, make yourself a bit smart"), the other one listening, while the barkeeper periodically breaks in to say, "HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME." By contrast, the first section of the poem, "The Burial of the Dead," serves as the voice-over accompaniment to a rapid-fire sequence of surrealistic images—for example, of natives performing obscure desert rituals, of rain falling in the desert, of a hotel in the Alps, of people skating and sledding, of a woman weeping on a bed, and so forth. It is an arresting montage—quite as arresting as some of the more artsy, Dali-esque perfume commercials they're making these days—but it serves only to distract the viewer from the poem. And the poem, heaven knows, is difficult enough to take in without such distractions.

The fact is, indeed, that the great majority of these poetry videos are not only distracting but distorting. Part of the purpose of any poem, after all, is to conjure up images in the reader's mind; a filmmaker who provides ready-made images as an accompaniment to a poem is thus not helping the poem to communicate its message but is, on the contrary, working against the poem, overwhelming the poet's images with his own. This happens continually in *Voices and Visions.* In one episode after another, the creators of the series appear unwilling to let poems simply be *poems.* Pitkethly has ob-

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tained films of Eliot, Frost, and several other poets reading their own work, but rarely in these thirteen hours do we see any of these poets recite an entire poem from beginning to end without interruption or adornment; time and again, the producers assume that a few seconds of Frost or Eliot onscreen (or Robert Lowell, or Marianne Moore) are quite enough—we've got to keep the images *moving,* you see—and so generally we're accorded only brief glimpses of the poets, sandwiched between thick slices of "striking images and photography," while the poets read in voice-over. The shameful truth about *Voices and Visions,* then, is that, for all the pious words about the art of poetry that fill their publicity materials, the series' creators seem to work from a single fundamental hypothesis: that poetry, by itself, cannot possibly be expected to capture and to retain the interest of a television audience for two or three minutes at a time, let alone for an entire hour, and that every time a poem is presented on one of the shows, it had better be accompanied by as many visual fireworks as possible.

Some of the poems, to be sure, are more effectively presented than others. Invariably the effectiveness is directly proportional to the simplicity of the accompanying visual images. Elizabeth Bishop's "The Shampoo," for example, is presented with a refreshing lack of distraction: while the poem is read, its words appear in white letters on a black screen, with the gentle sound of running water in the background. (One worries throughout the poem, alas, that at any moment the producers will cut to a shot of Mary Martin washing Ezio Pinza out of her hair.) Other Bishop poems are accompanied by equally simple and elegant visual images: a moon over the ocean, a beach at night. Even the dramatization of Bishop's poem "In the Waiting Room" is tolerable. The actress Blythe Danner (one of several celebrities who provide the series with voice-overs) offers a sensitive reading of the poem, in which Bishop recalls a momentous realization that came to her one day in her childhood, while she sat in a dentist's waiting room quietly reading the February, 1918, issue of *National Geographic.* This dramatization works because it is almost completely static: we are shown a little girl in period dress, sitting in just such a waiting room, reading that very issue of *National Geographic,* and not doing much at all except changing expression occasionally (and convincingly too: she's a much better actor than the husband and wife in "Home Burial"). It is because of the Bishop episode's refusal to overwhelm its subject's poetry that it is probably the most successful hour of the thirteen. (One must also admit that it is rather nice to look at the beautifully photographed scenes of the Brazilian town of Santarém while listening to Bishop's poem of that name, and to see the other exotic South American settings in which Bishop lived and from which she drew inspiration for her elaborately descriptive poems of nature.)

A particularly noisome aspect of these programs is that whenever any but the briefest of poems is read in its entirety, the director cuts away *in medias res*—in many cases not only once but several times—generally to one or more poets, critics, or poet-critics (e.g., Joseph Brodsky, Octavio Paz, Richard Wilbur, Derek Walcott, Grace Schulman, Alfred Kazin) who proceed to offer an instant analysis of what we've heard so far. It's as if the viewer can't be expected to concentrate on a whole poem, as if Pitkethly is afraid to risk losing viewers by presenting a poem in a single unbroken stretch. For instance, the recording of Lowell reading his "Quaker Graveyard in Nantucket"—which is accompanied by views of the sea and of fishermen working on ship decks—is interrupted for remarks by the critic Robert Hass; Moore's reading of "Marriage" is interrupted for a reminiscence by her friend Monroe Wheeler (and when the poem resumes it is being read not by Moore but by an actress). This is like breaking into Beethoven's Ninth for a dog-food commercial.

A great deal of time on these programs, in fact, is given over to brief snippets of interviews with authorities of various kinds—not

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only critics and poets but archivists, literary historians, biographers, and assorted relatives and friends of the subjects. Among the more interesting such interviews are those with people who knew the subjects intimately: Ezra Pound's mistress Olga Rudge and his daughter, Mary de Rachewiltz; Robert Lowell's second wife, Elizabeth Hardwick; Sylvia Plath's mother, Aurelia (who speaks candidly about Sylvia's first suicide attempt and her reaction to her father's death), Plath's friend A. Alvarez (who admits that "her friends, me included, abandoned her—she was very difficult"); and Marianne Moore's housekeeper of thirty-six years (who remembers how fond Moore was of T. S. Eliot and how hard she took it when he married). Though on the whole the poets interviewed in the series—most of whom are not, shall we say, world-class experts on the subjects at hand—tend to be vaguely reverent in their remarks, some of the series' more perceptive and affecting observations are in fact made by poets, especially by those who were acquainted with the subjects. The late Howard Moss, for instance, offers some quietly insightful comments about the work of his friend Elizabeth Bishop, and John Thompson's discussion of the work of his friend Robert Lowell is equally valuable. It is particularly refreshing, by the way, to watch Thompson, after he has begun to read a Lowell poem aloud, react with undisguised joy to the beauty of the first line; in the Stevens program, James Merrill's enthusiasm for "Final Soliloquy" is similarly heartening.

Alas, there is altogether too little of this sort of enthusiasm in the series, especially on the part of Vendler and her fellow academics, most of whom make the reading of poetry look just about as exciting as the practice of dentistry. If I were a college student unfamiliar with poetry, it would take little more than a glance at the humorless, bored, self-important countenances of Vendler, Marjorie Perloff, and Harold Bloom —to name the three critical heavyweights who appear more frequently than anyone else in these shows (or maybe it just seems that way)—to make me switch over to *Cheers.* Of course, there are admirable moments: A. Walton Litz is good on Stevens's attempt "to understand the relation between words and physical reality," as is Vendler on Stevens's affinities to his favorite painters, Klee and Cézanne. (The most memorable remarks about Stevens, however, are those made by Merrill, who eloquently addresses the question of Stevens's obscurity.) But too often the critics on *Voices and Visions* make poetry seem little more than a pretext for highfalutin theorizing. What, for instance, can the creators of the series possibly have expected the average college student to make of the irritable-looking Sandra Gilbert, who in the Plath program pours out paragraphs of nonsensical, automatic-pilot academese about Plath's "enclos[ure] in patriarchal history" and about how in Plath's poems "the father metamorphoses into a kind of figure with tremendous mythological reference"? (Joyce Carol Oates likewise carries on about patriarchy during the program on Dickinson.) All too often, I'm afraid, Pitkethly lets academic jargon and ideology get the upper hand; at such times one feels as if one is not in an introductory poetry class but—horrors!—at an MLA convention.

This being the case, it should not be surprising that many of the programs evince an unseemly preoccupation with the subjects' sexual psychology and sex lives. Nor do the series' creators permit the fact that some of the poets *had* no sex lives—or, at any rate, that they left no record thereof—to inhibit their curiosity about this topic. So what if Marianne Moore was a prudish spinster who, while an editor at *The Dial,* reportedly "turned down a lot of first-rate literature" because it struck her as naughty? The program manages to find someone (Kenneth Burke) who is willing to testify that "I never saw a more sexual woman." In the Eliot program, meanwhile, Joseph Chiari discusses the poet's "sexual inhibition." On the Hart Crane program, the ever-reliable Malcolm Cowley offers the opinion that "Hart was in love with me." And the Ezra Pound program, while ignoring many important

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chapters of Pound's life, does not fail to cover his "ménage à trois" with his wife and mistress.

Most notable of all, in this regard, is the Whitman episode, which carries on interminably about Whitman's love of physicality while showing us several minutes' worth of bizarre turn-of-the-century films of naked men exercising. Of all the issues that this episode might have focused on, moreover, it chooses to occupy itself with the question of whether Whitman ever actually slept with a man. Three "authorities"—Harold Bloom, Galway Kinnell, and Allen Ginsberg (who, incidentally, is talked about in this episode, by himself and others, as if he were the good gray poet's One True Heir)—give their solemn opinions on this matter, and in support offer quotations from *Leaves of Grass.* As if this were not enough, Ginsberg, apropos of nothing at all, apprises us gleefully of the possibility that "there was some genital directness" between himself and Whitman, since he (Ginsberg) slept with Neal Cassady, who had slept with one Gavin Arthur, who had in turn slept with Edward Carpenter, who claimed to have slept with his friend Walt Whitman. (Will this be on the test?)

But then we should be grateful, I suppose, that Ginsberg is not one of the poets featured in *Voices and Visions.* Indeed, though most readers of American poetry would doubtless select a somewhat different Top Thirteen, the list that Pitkethly and company have put together is essentially unobjectionable. Yet one would have liked to see, at some point, an explanation of how these thirteen came to be chosen. One would have preferred, too, a somewhat less cozy and claustrophobic approach to the subject—for the writers of the various programs and companion-book essays appear to have been encouraged to discuss their poets' relationships to other poets covered in the series, but discouraged from elaborating upon their poets' connections to colleagues *not* covered by the series. (The name of Louise Bogan, for example—to name just one poet who is at least as important as some of those featured in *Voices and Visions*—doesn't appear once in the entire Vendler book.)

Then there is the matter of sequence. The strikingly unchronological order in which the episodes are scheduled to be aired—with Frost batting first, and the nineteenth-century poets Whitman and Dickinson buried in the middle of the line-up—only serves to destroy any possibility of conveying a sense of historical development. If viewed in chronological sequence, after all, *Voices and Visions* would come across not just as a survey of American poetry but as a history of the development of modern poetry. Patently, Vendler doesn't *want* the series to have this emphasis: she doesn't want students to regard these poets, with their remarkable innovations in style, theme, and structure, primarily as examples of a historical movement known as modernism; rather, she wants students to think of them as *American poets,* and—as her introduction to *Voices and Visions: The Poet in America* makes clear—wants students in turn to recognize American poetry as something that is by nature "particularly willing to be surprising, unsettling, and fresh in its intuitions. It is that freshness and originality that we have wanted to show in each of our poets." Originality, rebelliousness, Americanness: these are three different qualities, but throughout the series—as well as in the Vendler book—one finds them being subtly equated. The misapprehensions that are likely to result from this distortion are not inconsiderable.

This is not to suggest that Vendler's companion book is completely unworthy. On the contrary, once one has gotten past her meandering introduction, the book is a great deal less dismaying than the series itself. The authors of the essays, Vendler informs us, were asked to consider "what [the poets] inherited, what they were fostered by, where they found their language, what they created in the way of forms." The results are extremely mixed. Richard B. Sewall, the biographer of Emily Dickinson, contributes a very fine prolegomenon to her poetry; Frank Kermode, for his part, provides a truly splendid essay on Eliot, con-

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taining a wonderfully sensible discussion of *The Waste Land* and as satisfying an account of "Tradition and the Individual Talent" as I have ever read. Some of the other essays, unfortunately, suffer from the usual academic failings. Take Calvin Bedient, for example, who tries too hard to match Whitman's energy and ends up combining unappetizing academic jargon (he speaks of Emerson's "paratactic brilliance") with equally unappetizing slang, and perpetrates an astonishing number of sentences that are either incomprehensible or ugly or both:

> Democratic enumeration of all things as equal-in-the-Whole would create, was creating, out of the God's plenty before it, its own bushel-barrel aesthetic of the concrete discursive manifold and its own log-rolling aesthetic of vigorous, uncheckable cadence and syntax.

> [Whitman] needed a verse-style that was cut to the same X-tra large size as the nationalistic Personality.

> He strikes the note of *personal* reality as the joyfullest definiteness against the elusive resonance of everything, and the note of *external* and *universal* reality as a rapturous release from the twangy, hard "I."

> Everything Whitman wrote is sharply interesting, except where he wrote it better before.

Bedient speaks of Whitman's verse-style as being "aphoristically fisted," characterizes a certain Whitman line as "moving in its triumphantly willed but reluctant darts and escapes" (with *darts* and *escapes,* that is, both serving as nouns), and twice describes Whitman's long, smooth descriptive lines as "cornucopia pours" (with *pours* serving as a noun). Here's his attempt to capture the effect of the Frederick Church painting *Niagara* upon a viewer: "The whole immediate spread of the infinitely varied motion of the waters becomes an extended agitation amidst serenity in the viewer's breast."

To read this wildly uneven book is to wonder who, exactly, are those "advanced students" for whom it has been compiled. Though essentially introductory in content, most of the essays read as if they were written for people who are way past the introductory stage: the essays, that is, aside from lapsing into jargon, contain numerous offhand references to writers, events, and movements with which even a very bright and well-read college freshman would probably not be familiar. In some of the essays, moreover—particularly Marjorie Perloff's piece on Williams—the critics appear to be doing nothing so much as talking to themselves, repeating tired academic formulas, asserting strong enthusiasms and convictions in which it is difficult for a reader to believe.

But even such a book is infinitely preferable, as an academic tool, to the television series it accompanies. For the fact remains that, however much money one spends on such a series, television can do little to help students accustom their minds to the modalities of poetry. Quite simply, the two media are incompatible; in trying continually to turn poems into something else—namely, into background music for stunning visual images—Pitkethly and company have implicitly acknowledged this cardinal truth. It is largely because of the series' wholesale degradation of poetry in this manner—and because of the vigorous manner in which the whole package is being marketed—that one worries profoundly about the possibility that the $350 videotape edition of *Voices and Visions,* along with the various companion books, will become a staple of high-school and college literature instruction, and that it will therefore drive many of the more worthwhile texts and anthologies off the market. For let there be no mistake: notwithstanding the occasional pleasures of *Voices and Visions,* to use it to introduce American poetry to anyone—whether high-school student, collegian, or "lifelong learner"—would be an act of genuine irresponsibility.

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Sartre and "Les Temps Modernes"

by David Gress

Two striking characteristics distinguished modern France in the years 1944-1975: the power of an intellectual elite that was pro-Communist and anti-democratic even as it preached a philosophy of individual freedom; and the simultaneous progress, under a series of increasingly technocratic governments, of economic prosperity and of a modern welfare state. The undisputed leader of the intellectual elite was the writer and existentialist philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980). Sartre and the people around him believed intellectuals must "commit themselves to their time," by which they meant that intellectuals, especially writers, had both the right and the obligation to judge—and even control—political life. To carry out this commitment something like an official journal was needed to propound doctrine and to define the right point of view on the issues of the day—political, academic, literary, or philosophical. That journal was *Les Temps Modernes,* a monthly founded by Sartre and his associates in 1945.

The hegemony of Sartre and *Les Temps Modernes* is a thing of the past, and we are now beginning to see the first broad scholarly assessments of them. Two of the most comprehensive have appeared within the last few months: *The Intellectual Enterprise: Sartre and "Les Temps Modernes,"* a sociological study by Anna Boschetti; and *Sartre and "Les Temps Modernes,"* a sympathetic chronicle of the journal by the British Marxist Howard Davies.[1] Both books are deeply flawed, but taken together they do allow us to track the changing fortunes of *Les Temps Modernes* and to better understand the reasons for Sartre's often baleful influence on French cultural life.

To put the role of Sartre and *Les Temps Modernes* in perspective, let us remind ourselves of the bare outlines of French political history in the same period. American and Free French forces liberated Paris from the Germans in August 1944. Charles de Gaulle, the military and political leader of the Free French and a conservative Catholic monarchist by conviction, formed the first postwar government. In 1946 he resigned, unable to carry out his agenda for the recovery and reconstruction of France. After twelve years of weak governments mainly of the center-left, and of economic stagnation aggravated by the bloody Algerian war, the French called him back as president in 1958. From 1958 to 1981, de Gaulle and his successors led governments of the center-right committed to a nationalistic foreign policy, economic growth, state power, and technical modernization. In 1981, the socialists took over both the presidency and the cabinet, but they pursued from the start an anti-

1 *The Intellectual Enterprise: Sartre and "Les Temps Modernes,"* by Anna Boschetti (translated from the Italian by Richard McCleary): Northwestern University Press, 271 pages, $32.95; *Sartre and "Les Temps Modernes,"* by Howard Davies: Cambridge University Press, 265 pages, $44.50.

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Soviet and pro-Western foreign policy. Within three years, international economic conditions forced them to engage in pro-capitalist policies at home as well.

In short, French governments, and the French governing elite since 1944, were overwhelmingly liberal or conservative, only partly socialist, and hardly at all Communist. The ideological history of France from 1944-1975, by contrast, perfectly illustrates the modern phenomenon of the adversary culture. Nowhere else was the adversary culture so strong for so long, nowhere else were those it regarded as its ideological enemies so unable to dispute its power, and nowhere else did this hegemony collapse as quickly as it did in France in the short period 1975-1977. The collapse was so absolute that the ideological atmosphere of Paris in the 1980s seems in some respects closer to 1880 than to 1945.

There were many crucial reasons for the predominance of this postwar adversary culture. We shall come to the part played by Jean-Paul Sartre and *Les Temps Modernes* in a moment. But let us first look at the French intellectual history that led up to Sartre and helped to define his special place in French intellectual life. As for the collapse of the adversary culture in France, it, too, had deep as well as immediate causes, and we shall have something to say about them presently.

Ideology and intellectuals, as concepts and as realities of cultural life, are both of French origin. Ideology differs from political philosophy in the methods and purposes of its advocates. Men pursue political philosophy to understand politics and society; they advance ideologies as part of a struggle for power. According to the historian Donald R. Kelley, ideology began in France when Protestant agitators used elements of religious and political doctrine to try to change the ecclesiastical policies of the French state in the 1530s.[2] The intellectual—who saw his purpose in life as the use of ideas—was also a French invention, and generally belonged to one of two general categories. The first was the academic or bureaucratic type, exemplified during the *ancien régime* by those government lawyers and orators who developed the political theories that justified absolutism. The second was the independent writer or artist. He existed uneasily with the rulers of the state, whom he regarded as sponsors or as enemies, according to need or ideology.

The adversary culture began when hostility to the political systems of the day became the norm among the independent intellectuals. According to Tocqueville, this moment came in the Enlightenment. The intellectuals of eighteenth-century France, he maintained, thought of themselves as the social equivalent of the Catholic clergy, to whose role as the nation's conscience they aspired. The governing class of the *ancien régime* was not disposed to share power with them, however, and the further the intellectuals felt themselves to be from political power, the more they became radical, subversive, revolutionary, and hostile to the prevailing system of government. Moderate political thinkers took the lead in the Revolution of 1789, which ended class rule and introduced the principles of equality before the law, universal suffrage, and government by the people. The leaders of the adversary culture became the Revolution's left wing and, thanks to the weakness of the moderates, were able to seize power in 1791-92 and institute the Terror.

The radicals were ultimately driven from political power, but this did not mean their extinction; on the contrary, as the French cultural historian Paul Bénichou showed in *Le temps des prophètes,* his 1977 study of the Restoration period (1815-1848), utopian and revolutionary writers flourished then as never before. Saint-Simon and Fourier predicted, earlier (and in better prose) than Karl Marx, the disappearance of hierarchy and the advent of socialism. An even more important figure on the road from the Enlightenment to Sartre was Auguste Comte,

2 See Donald R. Kelley, *The Beginning of Ideology: Consciousness and Society in the French Reformation*; Cambridge University Press, 1981.

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who hypothesized a tripartite scheme of history destined to culminate in an enlightened dictatorship of bankers and engineers, guided in turn by a "High Priest of Humanity." Comte claimed inspiration from the radicals of the Enlightenment as well as from Joseph de Maistre, the counter-revolutionary advocate of order and hierarchy. He hoped for both technocratic managerialism and a "religion of humanity" directed by intellectuals for the good of the masses, who were incapable of seeing to their own interests. One purpose of his philosophy, for which he invented the word "sociology," was to give a seemingly rational, scientific foundation to the claim of the intellectuals to rule society. Comte played a seminal role in the formation of modern French political culture: his faith in science and technology inspired the peculiarly French version of authoritarianism in the Third and the Fifth Republics, while his exaltation of the future role of intellectuals as leaders of a secular faith prefigured the culmination of intellectual self-aggrandizement in the person of Sartre and his associates.

Other social philosophers, notably Nietzsche and his compatriots Max Weber and Alois Schumpeter, took up where Tocqueville's intellectual history left off and predicted that capitalism, modern bureaucracy, modern business, and modern mass politics would further strengthen the tendency of intellectuals toward radical criticism of their own societies. In France this strengthening happened suddenly—with the Dreyfus Affair, which provided the adversary culture of modern France with its founding myth.

The role of the Ecole Normale Supérieure in this myth-making process cannot be overestimated. From 1888 to 1926, Lucien Herr, the librarian of the Ecole and a socialist, served as the ideological educator and network manager for a growing group of socialists and radicals most of whom (like Sartre in his younger days) went on to teach the future rulers of France in *lycées* and universities across the country. The Ecole itself was one of the elite *grandes écoles* which trained the governing class of France. Founded in 1795, its main formal mission was to train teachers in the humanities; its real function, from the days of Herr until the 1960s, was to establish radical socialism as *the* ideology and fundamental doctrine of the French cultural elite.

When the Dreyfus Affair broke in 1897-98, most *normaliens,* as graduates of the Ecole were known, joined with writers and artists like Emile Zola and Anatole France in condemning an attempt by the government and the army to cover up a gross miscarriage of justice. In January 1898, one hundred and four writers and educators, mostly *normaliens,* signed a manifesto demanding that Dreyfus's conviction be quashed. The resulting debate split French political culture in two, pitting the *dreyfusards,* who had the wonderful feeling of knowing they were on the side of justice, against the nationalist, anti-Semitic, and ultra-Catholic Right. The writer Ferdinand Brunetière wrote that "today it is the intellectuals who incarnate the true traditions of French conscience and of the French spirit."

The French intellectual Left derived three lessons from the Affair, which they applied to great effect in presenting themselves as the only legitimate intelligentsia. The first was that the true intellectual must be either a radical republican or a socialist; in any case, he must be egalitarian and anti-clerical. The second was that the Right was always wrong, and that there were "no enemies on the Left." French intellectuals held fast to this lesson long after the Communists seceded from the French Socialist Party in 1920 and established their own party, which they quickly turned into the most totalitarian and Stalinist in the West. The third and perhaps most important lesson, at least for Sartre, was that the true intellectual must be *engagé,* "committed," to progressive social and political causes. As early as 1898, a *dreyfusard* said, "Our teaching would be without authority if we were not ready to confirm it by our acts." Because they believed this statement, which is in itself completely illogical, and because their (mostly verbal) acts were so often in defense of

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violence, inhumanity, and totalitarian oppression, the French progressive intellectuals arguably did more real harm to more people than any comparable group in modern times.

The evolution of French intellectual life from the days of the Affair to the present has been wonderfully chronicled in a recent book by two French sociologists, Pascal Ory and Jean-François Sirinelli.[3] The authors are not concerned exclusively with Sartre or *Les Temps Modernes,* of course, but their book provides useful background information to the overtly engaged histories of Boschetti and Davies, who clearly intend to justify the *Temps Modernes* ideology as they describe it. Both Boschetti and Davies disappoint the reader who expects a complete history of *Les Temps Modernes* in the context of French politics and culture for the forty years or so of its existence. Boschetti, an Italian student of the sociologist Paul Bourdieu (himself a *Temps Modernes* intellectual), wants to apply the sociology of culture to what Bourdieu calls the "intellectual field," that is, the personalities and institutions of "cultural production." For Boschetti, this means looking not only at Sartre but at his collaborators and competitors, as well as at the conditions that permitted Sartre's rise to a position of undisputed eminence in French cultural life. All this she does reasonably well, but the proportions of her book are curious. She explains "the conditions of Sartre's success at the liberation" by going back to the Dreyfus Affair and discussing at considerable length the struggles over method, orientation, and proper subject matter in French philosophy, sociology, and literary criticism of the 1930s. She then turns to Sartre's early career as a student at the Ecole Normale Supérieure in the late 1920s, as a writer on philosophical psychology in the 1930s, and as a novelist and playwright during the war years. Only in the last hundred pages of her book do we hear how Sartre launched *Les Temps Modernes* in October 1945 with the philo-Communist philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty; and only then do we hear about his relations with other intellectual groups and journals, notably Georges Bataille's *Critique* and Emmanuel Mounier's *Esprit,* in the immediate postwar years. A short, final chapter includes a few comments on the years 1947-1953 and even fewer on the years after that. Boschetti explains that *Les Temps Modernes* soon "ceased to be the tangible and faithful expression of the state of the field." While this may be true, at least according to her sociological doctrine, it betrays the reader who wants a history of the journal and of Sartre's thought in relation to it.

Davies's book is more extensive chronologically. It is a detailed study of the views and personalities of the editorial board of *Les Temps Modernes,* their mutual relations, the kinds of articles they published, and, of course, their political and ideological *engagement* from 1945 to around 1968, with a conclusion sketching developments into the mid-1980s. Davies, an Englishman, teaches at the North London Polytechnic, which since my own student days in England has been perhaps *the* prime site of British academic Marxism in the social sciences. He is a good example of his type, in that his writing demonstrates at once the vices of ideology and the irrepressible virtues of British empiricism. No matter how harsh or intolerant in their doctrinal views, few British Marxists seem to be able to shrug off entirely the habits of accuracy, good writing, and careful scholarship inculcated by their scholarly tradition.

These persistent habits are the reader's gain. As a chronicler, Davies is a good English empiricist, careful to name names and give dates. He informs, and this gives his study a tremendous advantage over Boschetti's mixture of theoretical sociology and spuriously precise diagrams. On the other hand, thanks to his ideology, he identifies far more than Boschetti with his subject and indeed promises "a Sartrean

3 *Les intellectuels en France, de l'Affaire Dreyfus à nos jours,* by Pascal Ory and Jean-François Sirinelli; Armand Colin, 265 pages.

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view of *Les Temps Modernes.*" He claims that this identification is "the best compliment that can be paid to a publication which, because of the premium set on reflexivity, has succeeded in sustaining a high level of intellectual tension long enough to hold the curiosity and to shape the attitudes of three generations—those whose maturation was marked by the Liberation, by the Algerian War and by May 1968."

This statement raises problems. First, Davies absurdly overrates the importance of debates and interventions in *Les Temps Modernes* on French politics at large; in a typical example, he asserts with apparent seriousness that a 1964 article by Marc Kravetz was the single most important factor in rallying broad support for the demonstrations of 1968. Kravetz, the leader of a branch of the French national union of university students, argued that students should not collaborate with trade unions that were not genuinely revolutionary. Now, it is true that the French take ideology seriously, and no doubt some people read the article and adopted it as part of their arsenal for the struggle, but to present it as the primary cause of the 1968 uprising while ignoring national political developments is absurd.

The other problem with Davies's identification with his hero is that he genuinely believes that Sartre was a philosopher of freedom and liberation, and that the struggle of *Les Temps Modernes* was a struggle for humanity against oppression. For Davies, the enemies are still (in 1987!) "Armageddon [an Anglo-Marxist code word for nuclear war caused by American "imperialism"], racialism and the extreme Right." He is clearly alarmed as well as puzzled by the collapse of leftist hegemony in France since 1975. He observes that while "those who feel the danger of totalisation by Armageddon will be best placed to rediscover the power and relevance that Sartrean philosophy so obviously had in the sixties," it is unlikely that this "will be undertaken by the French." If it occurs to him to ask what caused that collapse, he resolutely represses the question; and his list of grievances sound rather more like the bleatings heard in the corridors of North London Polytechnic or at Greenham Common than the genuine ideological and political concerns of French intellectuals today, whatever their stripe.

What was, in Boschetti's words, the "situation of Sartre in 1945"? According to her, it was the well-earned situation of one who had paid his dues in mental energy and time spent developing a coherent view of man and the world. In an already considerable corpus of writings—novels, plays, and nonfiction, culminating in *Being and Nothingness* (1943) and *The Roads to Freedom* (a novel written during the war)—he had gallicized and dramatized the German "philosophy of existence" of Husserl and Heidegger, arguing that "man is his freedom" and that man's freedom is found only in the "projects" he undertakes. Now, in 1945, Sartre stood ready to launch his own projects in the world, the most important of which was undoubtedly *Les Temps Modernes.*

According to a more cynical view—and I think an accurate one—Sartre in 1945 was a political and ideological freeloader, a man without original thoughts but with tremendous drive, energy, and manipulative ability. He had read a few German thinkers and had used their ideas for some novels and plays that captured the disillusioned and nihilistic atmosphere of the time. Politically, he was not merely cautious but obtuse. When he and his wife, Simone de Beauvoir, spent a year in Germany in 1933, they judged the Nazi regime to be either irrelevant or beneath their notice. By contrast, when Sartre's fellow *normalien* Raymond Aron taught in Germany the year before, he had immediately recognized the character of Hitler's movement and the danger it posed to Europe as a whole. The contrast between Aron's awareness in 1932 and Sartre's lofty indifference in 1933 is worth mentioning. The two were friends until 1947, when Sartre repudiated Aron because Aron refused to abandon his faith in liberal democracy; Sartre claimed that Aron was a political idiot

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for failing to see that one could only find true freedom in a commitment to revolutionary Marxism. The two men's contrasting record in the 1930s, and Sartre's record since 1945 of apologizing for Soviet and other Marxist tyrannies, is sufficient comment on the accusation.

Sartre's political commitment was not something that grew out of long reflection on modern history. Rather, it was a clever response to the situation of 1945, a response that was dramatically effective in bringing him power, prestige, and intellectual hegemony. Sartre had avoided the great political choices of the 1930s: for or against the Popular Front with the Communists, the Spanish Civil War, or standing up to Hitler; and he had sat out the German Occupation in complete safety in Paris. The point is not, as the philosopher Vladimir Jankélévitch argued in 1985 in *Libération,* that Sartre was a coward or an active collaborator or anything of the sort; the point is that he was politically indifferent, that he took the freedom given to him and to other Frenchmen by the Allies and the Free French in 1944 as if it were somehow his own achievement. There would have been nothing wrong with this had he been content to remain what he was before 1944, an apolitical and somewhat unworldly philosopher. When, however, he insisted in the first issue of *Les Temps Modernes* that "because we act on our era by our very existence, we decide that this action will be voluntary," and when he called on writers to commit themselves to anti-capitalist, revolutionary ideology, he was acting less from some superior ethical position than from a sure sense of the main chance.

Since Sartre's philosophy glorified the act of choosing rather than any particular choice, it could be used to justify any kind of commitment—aesthetic, ideological, sexual, or whatever. In different circumstances, say a Nazi victory in Europe, it is hard to see just what in his philosophy would have stopped him from announcing, with equal fervor, that the obligation of the true intellectual was to be a fascist. His writings before 1944 shared the nihilistic *Zeitgeist* of those French writers—Robert Brasillach, Pierre Drieu la Rochelle, and Louis-Ferdinand Céline among them—who committed themselves to the cause of the Third Reich and Vichy. Like many other continental writers, they were "decisionists," glorifying the act of forceful decision as such over the "effete" speculations of those who sought to weigh the ethical implications of various choices.

Thus, Sartre's choice in 1944-45 was historically an accident. What he received in 1944 was not merely the gift of political freedom but the promise that if he made the one radical commitment that was still viable—the commitment to the revolutionary Left, as carried into Central Europe on the bayonets of the victorious Red Army—he would be in complete accord with his time. The defeat of the Third Reich had delegitimized any political position remotely associated with the Right. Conveniently, the postwar ideology made no distinctions between democratic conservatism, authoritarian conservatism, and the radicalism of the Nazis, and it used the horrors of Nazism to impute a preliminary guilt to any intellectual suspected of non-leftist leanings.

The effect of this assault on the Right was particularly strong in France because it was an undeniable, if unfortunate, fact that many Frenchmen, including many intellectuals, had been on the Right in the 1930s, and that the Vichy regime, the *Etat Français,* as it called itself, was not some foreign aberration grafted onto the dead body of defeated France in 1940. Rather, it was an indigenous formation which represented a variety of political, cultural, and ideological traditions. These, in turn, derived from a general opposition to three historical realities of French history: the revolutionary ideology of 1789 and 1848, the secular progressivism of the Third Republic, and the radical socialism of the *dreyfusards* and the Popular Frontists of the 1930s. At all costs, the shapers of postwar French culture had to deny the native roots of Vichy if they were to succeed in their scheme of transformation.

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Scholars debate the duration of the leftist hegemony in postwar French culture. The historian Herbert Lottman finds its beginning, correctly, during the Popular Front of the 1930s, but argues curiously that it ended around 1950, since after that date French intellectuals were interested in "strictly national issues" and no longer took the idea of commitment as seriously.[4] In their book on French intellectuals, Ory and Sirinelli make a more cogent claim that the leftists' "sole control" of the terrain ended after the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956. Boschetti, as we have seen, evades the question by saying that *Les Temps Modernes* was no longer "representative of the field" after 1950, while Davies is reluctant to admit that control could have slipped from the Left at all.

In order to reconcile these viewpoints we must distinguish between a leftist hegemony *in general*—that is, an intellectual climate permitting variety and debate, within certain strict limits—and the hegemony of a particular variety of leftism, such as that of *Les Temps Modernes*. The latter did indeed begin to crumble not long after it was established, perhaps by the mid-1950s, but the hegemony and control of the moral high ground by the Left as a whole did not end until the French intellectuals rediscovered the force of liberalism in the mid-1970s.

Even during the period of *Les Temps Modernes*'s greatest power and prestige, from 1945 to 1956, most of its writers and editors were not Communists. The Communist Party intellectuals tended to belong to an older generation, or to the new generation of *normaliens* who entered the Ecole in the late 1940s and early 1950s. This cohort included an impressive number of Communist Party adherents: the philosopher Edgar Morin, the political scientist Annie Kriegel, and the historians Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie and Alain Besançon. All of these intellectuals, it should be noted, left the Party in fairly short order. In their later careers, they became some of the most articulate foes of Communist totalitarianism that Europe has produced. Their statements and writings played a major part in bringing about the collapse of the intellectual Left in the mid-1970s and, even more important, in sustaining the anti-Communist consensus of French political culture in the years that followed.

The Communists never really trusted Sartre or *Les Temps Modernes,* which makes much of the journal's itinerary between 1945 and 1960 look like a long exercise in unrequited love. The fact was that *Les Temps Modernes* was resolutely philo-Communist, to the extent that Sartre and Merleau repeatedly tried to rescue the idea of revolutionary Communism from the unfortunate "accidents along the way" for which the Soviet Union was responsible. In 1947, the Trotskyite David Rousset had published an exhaustive report on the Soviet gulag. In 1950, neither for the first nor for the last time, Sartre and Merleau wondered in *Les Temps Modernes* whether the Soviet Union was truly socialist:

> It is well established [the editors wrote] that Soviet citizens can be deported for investigation, without a verdict and without limit of time . . . . It is likely that the total number of detainees is in the millions; some say ten million, others fifteen . . . . There is no socialism when one citizen in twenty is in the camps. There is no point in answering that every revolution has its traitors or that the class struggle is not over just because there is an uprising, or that the USSR could not defend itself against the external enemy without suppressing the domestic enemy, or that Russia could not industrialize without great violence . . . . These responses are not valid when we are talking about . . . a tenth of the male population after a third of a century. If, in the USSR, there is one saboteur, one spy, one malingerer for every twenty inhabitants, after more than one purge to "purify" the country, if today it is necessary to "re-educate" ten million Soviet citizens, thirty-two years after the revolution of October 1917, then it is the case that the

4 See *The Left Bank: Writers, Artists, and Politics from the Popular Front to the Cold War,* by Herbert R. Lottman; Little, Brown, 1982.

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> system itself unceasingly re-creates its own opposition . . . . If the common criminal detainees are more reliable for the regime than the political detainees, it must be that it gets along better with the criminal proletariat than with conscientious proletarians . . . .
>
> Does this permanent crisis of the Russian regime have to do with the very principle of collective production? . . . [D]oes it have to do with the political structure of the USSR and, if so, does it concern only the Stalinist phase or was it prefigured in the Bolshevik organization of the Party itself and, if we are to believe this, what other political formation might one conceive, what guarantees might one find against this decadence?

Sensible questions indeed, one might say, particularly in 1950; only they were followed not by an equally sensible analysis of the virtues and vices of Western liberal democracy and its economic system, but by the claim, offered without evidence, that "the decadence of Communism does not mean that the class struggle is a myth . . . . We conclude not that we must be indulgent toward Communism, but that we can in no case treat with its enemies." Why? Because, though the practice might be rotten, the ideals are still good: "No Nazi ever burdened himself with notions such as mutual respect between human beings, internationalism, the classless society. It is true that these ideas find in Communism today an unfaithful carrier . . . . Nevertheless that is where they remain." It only occurred to Sartre at the very end of his life (if it occurred to him at all) that it was precisely this claim to be "good," this claim to represent "mutual respect" and "internationalism," that was the foundation of Communism's true evil. Sartre was never willing to see that for Communists "mutual respect" and other good things were simply devices to confuse the opposition, win the sympathy of useful idiots, and gain power.

Few in the 1950s were able to see this far. One who could was Sartre's friend and colleague Albert Camus. In *The Rebel* (1951), he described modern nihilism and the betrayal of humanitarian ideals by the manipulators of rebellion. He saw dimly that what made the Communists so dangerous was their ostensible allegiance to humanitarian ideals; it allowed them to pretend that they stood in the great tradition of Western liberation, truly concerned to improve man's lot. Camus's book aroused Sartre's hatred and led to a furious polemic in *Les Temps Modernes* in 1952 that caused the final and irreparable breach between the two men. Sartre found it particularly galling that Camus insisted on remaining a man of the Left, claiming for the democratic West only a "quarter of the truth," which was not perfect but certainly superior to "the total lie" of the totalitarian East. To have answered Camus properly, Sartre would have had to make a genuine choice. But Sartre hated choices, especially hard ones. It is a grand irony that the prophet of existentialism and commitment was less willing to take genuine risks than most of those he vilified for not taking them.

One of the great forgotten characters of postwar French culture was the sociologist Jules Monnerot. He was a former Communist who, in 1949, published a classic work entitled *Sociologie du communisme*. In 1970, a short but equally worthwhile book appeared: *La France intellectuelle*. In its implications it is at least as devastating as Tocqueville's ruthless unmasking of the will to power of the Enlightenment radicals. There is a passage in it which is pertinent to the hypocrisy of Sartre:

> Truly, to carry out the function of thinking in a political society of the twentieth century one may have to risk losing the benefit of security recently obtained, of upward social mobility, of arrival in the comfortable middle class. One may have to risk seeing oneself thrown into opposition, not just opposition for fun but the kind known to those who are its victims today, where Power kicks you in the stomach, where the gates clang shut, where the silence of the cemetery descends on your living spirit while the prudences and the fears of others change the acoustics; you can cry out, but the sounds no longer carry.

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Sartre was professionally in opposition, but it was "opposition for fun"; his rhetoric comforted those who were busy closing the gates and modifying the acoustics, first in Central Europe, later in Cuba and Africa, finally in Southeast Asia.

In 1952, Sartre abandoned even the modest skepticism concerning Soviet Communism which he and Merleau had announced in 1950. Starting with a series of articles on "the Communists and Peace," the *Temps Modernes* intellectuals launched a major effort to gain the sympathy of the Soviets and the French Communist Party. Sartre gloried in Castro's "liberation" of Cuba in 1959 and in the progress of the Vietnamese Communists in the 1960s. In 1961, he wrote the preface to Frantz Fanon's *The Damned of the Earth,* an attack on Western democracy for being imperialist and an apologia for violence in the interests of Marxist-Leninist "liberation" movements in the Third World.

Les Temps Modernes, meanwhile, was starting to go its own way under the direction of André Gorz, a labor militant and socialist of long standing. Davies makes much of Gorz's editorship in the 1960s, when he was an advocate of revolution and centralized socialism. He neglects to mention that Gorz, starting around 1975, abandoned his earlier beliefs and became a virtual libertarian. Since then, Gorz has written in support of economic liberty and against the injustice of egalitarianism; he has even suggested that the entire vocabulary and ideological apparatus of European socialism is useless to deal with the real problems of the global society of the future. He played an important role in shifting the French Socialist Party toward an anti-Soviet foreign policy in the late 1970s.

This brings us to the collapse of the hegemony of the Left, understood as the hegemony of what Sartre, in a famous phrase, called "the unsurpassable horizon of our time," revolutionary Marxism. In Sartre's view, for any political talk to make sense at all it had to adopt Marxist categories. To discuss politics, culture, or any public matter in any other language was either to talk nonsense or to act in bad faith. Bad faith, incidentally, was something Sartre regarded as the very depth of immorality. This may strike us as slightly ludicrous, given Sartre's own record.

The student uprising of 1968 confounded the ideologues at *Les Temps Modernes,* who had predicted in 1967 that it would take at least ten years of hard, subversive work to make France ready for the great leap forward. When the outbreaks came, *Les Temps Modernes* welcomed them, but defensively. The journal found it hard to understand why most people outside the sixth arrondissement did not support the students and why the result was not some kind of syndicalized, anarchist university but a bureaucratization of higher education that left professors and students far more beholden to the state than before.

If the events of May were the first chink in the armor, the events of the following years decisively destroyed it. Nothing could equal the impact of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, whose *Gulag Archipelago* began appearing in French in 1974. What is more, its publication coincided with the arrival in Paris of East European dissidents who reinforced its anti-Soviet and anti-Communist message. A generation of French anti-Communist writers, many of whom had been around for some years without managing to make themselves heard, finally added their voices to the debate. Some of these were former *Temps Modernes* associates, like Cornelius Castoriadis, who wrote books denouncing the West's inability to understand the mortal threat posed by Soviet imperialism; or Claude Lefort, who came to regard centralized collectivism as found in the Soviet Union as the single greatest threat to the achievements of the modern world. The most important of the anti-Communist writers was of course Raymond Aron himself, Sartre's old schoolmate. His books, which *Les Temps Modernes* had either ignored or denounced for years, now suddenly appeared as profound contributions to political phi-

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losophy and as incisive critiques of contemporary politics—which is of course what they had been all along.

Sartre himself continued on his muddled way, refusing to acknowledge past error but slowly edging, one sensed, away from the mindless leftism imposed by "the unsurpassable horizon of our time." His last substantive contribution to *Les Temps Modernes* was a denunciation of the French general election of 1973 as a fraud since it offered the voter no real choice between reaction and revolution. As late as 1974 he could still visit imprisoned West German terrorists, guilty of murder and mayhem, and congratulate them for their brave stand against the "fascistoid" state. But these were the gestures of a slowly dying man and a dead ideology. Simone de Beauvoir inadvertently illustrated how empty, meaningless, and absurdly one-sided Sartre's political commitments had been when she listed —in her memoir of Sartre's last years—the petitions against political oppression that Sartre had published in the first six months of 1977:

> On January 9 an appeal in support of Politique "Hebdo" [a radical left weekly] which was having difficulties; on January 23 an appeal against oppression in Morocco; on March 22 a letter to the president of the tribunal in Laval in support of Yvan Pineau, charged with having returned his military papers; on March 26 a protest against the arrest of a singer in Nigeria; on March 27 an appeal for freedom in Argentina; on June 29 a petition to the Belgrade conference [on security and cooperation in Europe] against oppression in Italy; on July 1 a protest against the deterioration of the situation in Brazil.

Such puerile litanies could be duplicated for any six months in Sartre's public life.

By 1977, three other groups had joined the attack on the *Temps Modernes* ideology. The first and initially most spectacular group was the so-called New Philosophes, who were led by the twenty-eight-year-old *normalien* Bernard Henri-Lévy and by a former student of Sartre's, André Glucksmann. Both had been active in the events of 1968. In 1975, provoked by the appearance of Solzhenitsyn's work, Glucksmann had published the most scathing denunciation of Soviet totalitarianism that had been seen in France since Rousset's work of 1947. Glucksmann and Levy both followed this up with new works attacking the totalitarianism of the Left on a grand scale. Within a few years, the "new philosophy" had petered out, but not before it had delivered fatal blows to the intellectual hegemony not merely of Sartre but of Marxism in general. Its adherents had done this mainly by using Sartre's own weapons—flamboyant rhetoric, ideological character assassinations, media blitzes.

The second group of anti-Sartrists in the late 1970s belonged to the New Right, which rejected not merely Marxism but Christianity, liberal democracy, and popular government as well. Its leaders, Alain de Benoist and Louis Pauwels, proclaimed a pagan doctrine based on nationalism, magical mysticism, and social Darwinism. Like the new philosophy, the New Right was primarily a media phenomenon, but behind the flashes one detected reminiscences of the ideology of the anti-*dreyfusards,* of the proto-Fascist Action Française, and of Vichy. Also like the new philosophy, the New Right faded fast. Some of its ideas, however, influenced the extreme right-wing party known as the National Front, which rose to prominence in the 1980s.

The third and most serious ideological challenge to the *Temps Modernes* doctrines was democratic liberalism, which took two forms. One was a broad attack on the French Left's anti-Americanism and sympathies for Third World dictatorships. The authors of this attack demonstrated that the Soviet Union and Third World socialist regimes were infinitely more murderous and oppressive than any capitalist society. The leader of this effort was Jean-François Revel, best known in America for his indictment of Western decadence in *How Democracies Perish* (1984). The other form was a restatement of the case for economic liberty, made

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above all by Aron but now supported by many younger figures, like the economic philosopher Serge Kolm and the journalists Henri Lepage and Guy Sorman. These attacks effectively demolished the last remnants of the *Temps Modernes* case for supporting self-styled liberation.

In 1979, André Glucksmann helped to organize a rally of French intellectuals and other public figures to raise money for the Vietnamese boat people. Sartre came to the rally, as did Aron, who had not spoken to his "little comrade" in over thirty years. Characteristically, Aron made no reference to the past; nor did Sartre, although he had plenty of reasons to apologize. Aron had always taken Sartre's philosophy completely seriously on its own terms, interpreting and analyzing it in his writing, whereas Sartre had on principle refused even to engage Aron's liberal philosophy.

The 1979 rally marks a convenient ending point for a survey of the ideology of *Les Temps Modernes.* The journal exists today, struggling to find an identity that will escape the ridicule of the newly enlightened Left and to avoid painting itself into a ghetto of old ideas and tired minds. Its glory days, however, are undoubtedly over.

Forthcoming in *The New Criterion:*

André Gide: Faust or Mephistopheles? *by Renee Winegarten*
Acconci & company at MOMA *by Roger Kimball*
Wyeth's "Helga" and other disasters *by William C. Agee*
Robert Louis Stevenson *by Bruce Bawer*
Giovanni Pisano *by Creighton Gilbert*
Gore Vidal's "Empire" *by Brock Baker*
The "Talking 'Terrorism'" conference at Stanford *by David Gress*
New poems *by Charles Edward Eaton & Donald Justice*

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The Flagstad legend

by Samuel Lipman

The exact nature of the relation in classical music between composition and performance remains at best confused and paradoxical. On the simplest level, music can hardly exist without performance; those gifted enough to "hear" music directly from a reading of the score are few, and even those fortunate individuals would doubtless admit even their talents are hardly able to do more than present a schematic, rather than a definitive, picture of the composer's intentions. On the other hand, a musical composition can live in many realizations that differ widely in conception, quality, and competence of execution.

Furthermore, the balance between composition and performance changes for different kinds of music. Great music, as the pianist Artur Schnabel pointed out, is greater than its performers. It is difficult to think of the most cerebral works, like Bach's *Art of Fugue* or *Musical Offering,* as dependent for their continued existence on any particular realization. And even the esteemed masterworks of Mozart and Beethoven seem to thrive wherever, however, and, by whomever they are performed. By contrast, the continuing presence of music of lesser ambition and achievement seems to depend more on the personalities of the performers. This is especially clear in the fate of classical encore pieces, and of popular music in general.

Perhaps this split between the composition-oriented status of great music and the performance-oriented status of popular music is least evident in opera. Here, of course, one does not deal in abstract musical notation but rather with immensely attractive people, lustily singing on the stage and vibrantly living real lives before the audience. So it is no accident that the greatest musical careers—greatest, that is, in the sense of capturing the hearts of a mass audience—have for many years been made by singers: one would search in vain for a pianist or a violinist, or even a conductor, whose public presence has equaled that of such present-day songbirds as Luciano Pavarotti and Beverly Sills.

Not surprisingly, there remain cults of these charmed beings long after their retirements and deaths. One such cult is that of Enrico Caruso, whose artistic life served to form our image of the Italian singer and of Italian opera, and even of Italy itself. Caruso's triumph over his repertory, however, was only to be expected, for most of what he sang (from Meyerbeer and early Verdi to Puccini) was at the very least far from Olympian.

In the case of an arguably much greater body of operatic composition—Richard Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde, Die Meistersinger, Der Ring des Nibelungen,* and *Parsifal*—it might be thought that performers would pale beside the stature of the music. And, indeed, present evidence suggests as much. While performances of these masterworks still command audience and critical interest, today's Wagnerian singers, when they are

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not more or less voiceless, seem faceless. A lover of these monumental works would be hard put to mention one contemporary singer of this repertory, whether female or male, whose vocalism proclaims itself as irreplaceable, or whose personality comes across the footlights as truly memorable.

Recorded evidence suggests that today's Wagner presentations are not the thrilling artistic experiences an older generation knew. In this regard, three singers take pride of place: the Hungarian baritone Friedrich Schorr (1888-1953), the Danish tenor Lauritz Melchior (1890-1973), and the Norwegian soprano Kirsten Flagstad (1895-1962). Schorr, Melchior, and Flagstad all left major phonographic documentation. Schorr, famous for his portrayals of Wotan in the *Ring* and especially of Hans Sachs in *Die Meistersinger,* made many 78 RPM records in the late 1920s and early 1930s[1]; Melchior's discs date from these relatively early days of electrical recording but also extend to the later 1930s and the early-to-mid-1940s. Of these three great artists, Flagstad was perhaps best treated by the phonograph, for almost all her recording activity took place from the mid-1930s to the end of the 1950s, with a significant part of it occurring after World War II, in the electronically advanced era of the tape recorder.

And what recordings Flagstad's are! Only a few can be mentioned here, and yet they are enough to suggest her whole achievement. First, there are the excerpts, often in duplicate versions dating from various times in her career, of the great moments from the *Ring* that she made her own—in particular the Immolation Scene from *Götterdämmerung*—and major sections of *Tristan* (including a dazzling RCA recording of the love duet with Melchior), as well as the Herzeleide scene from Act II of *Parsifal* (again with Melchior). In addition, the past decade has seen the availability of her complete performances of the *Ring* and of *Tristan.* The leading item in this distinguished collection, if only because it was the sole complete performance of a major Wagner role by Flagstad at the height of her career to be commercially released, was the 1952 *Tristan* with the great conductor Wilhelm Furtwängler. Of almost equal importance was the complete *Ring* Flagstad did with Furtwängler at La Scala in 1950; this recording, based on broadcast tapes of varying quality, documents Flagstad's Brünnhilde toward the end of her career, and has been released on several private labels in LP pressings of equally varying quality.

Flagstad's non-commercial recordings are not limited to these late examples of her art.[2] They include her complete 1936 Covent Garden *Tristan,* with Melchior in the title role and Fritz Reiner conducting.[3] Another *Tristan*—a complete broadcast of the opera from 1941—was made available by the Metropolitan Opera several years ago; the tenor is again Melchior, but the conductor this time is the very young Erich Leinsdorf. One can also hear, though in relatively dim sound, the 1937 Met broadcast of *Lohengrin* (conducted by Maurice Abravanel) and the 1938 broadcast of *Siegfried* (conducted by Bodanzky, with Melchior in the title role).

Returning to the world of modern re-

1 For a discussion of Schorr's records, along with those of other famous Wagnerians of the period, see my article "Growing Up With Old Records" in *The New Criterion,* April, 1984.

2 It should be mentioned that Flagstad's greatest role outside Wagner, that of Leonore in Beethoven's *Fidelio,* has frequently been available in two stunning performances: a 1938 Met broadcast conducted by Artur Bodanzky (with Friedrich Schorr as Pizzaro); and a 1950 Salzburg Festival performance conducted by Furtwängler.

3 This recording was originally made by EMI/HMV for commercial release, but was blocked (according to the legendary HMV producer Fred Gaisberg) because Melchior felt that the microphone placement favored Flagstad at his expense. My copy of this wonderful performance does not seem to have been made with the benefit of recent advances in the resuscitation of old 78 RPM originals. Perhaps at this late date, after performers' passions can no longer influence the decision, EMI should consider issuing this classic recording.

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cording, one finds a wealth of Flagstad discs made after World War II for EMI, and then, in the last years of her career, for Decca. In addition to many Wagner excerpts, there are complete recordings of Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas* (with Flagstad as Dido and Elisabeth Schwarzkopf as Belinda) and Gluck's *Alceste.* From the very end of Flagstad's career, six years after her official New York retirement, there is her 1958 portrayal of Fricka in the Solti *Das Rheingold,* the first installment of his now standard *Ring.*[4] One additional non-Wagner item, too, deserves mention: a technically inadequate but magically evocative 1950 broadcast disc of Flagstad's world premiere performance (undertaken by her at the composer's request) of Richard Strauss's *Four Last Songs* with Furtwängler conducting the Philharmonia Orchestra in London.

Born in 1895 to a family of professional musicians, Kirsten Flagstad appeared first in public in 1913. She sang a great deal of light music, including operettas and musical comedies, though she also sang Nedda in Leoncavallo's *I Pagliacci,* Desdemona in Verdi's *Otello,* Marguerite in Gounod's *Faust,* and the title role in Puccini's *Tosca.* In 1929, she tried her first Wagner role, appearing as Elsa in *Lohengrin*; in 1930 she sang Eva in *Die Meistersinger,* and finally, in 1932, Isolde. An invitation to the Bayreuth Festival in 1933 resulted in her singing small parts; at the next year's festival she appeared as Sieglinde in *Die Walküre* and Gutrune in *Götterdämmerung.* Her growing reputation, very much assisted by the praise of the great Russian bass Alexander Kipnis, produced a Metropolitan Opera audition in 1934. Now almost forty, she was immediately engaged; there seems no evidence that the Met realized quite what a prize it had gotten hold of.

Though Flagstad's great career was late in coming, once launched it proved immediately full grown. She first appeared at the Metropolitan as Sieglinde on February 2, 1935, and the reaction was tumultuous. *The New York Times*'s Olin Downes wrote:

> To the Metropolitan Association came yesterday a new singer who made an immediate and indeed irresistible appeal to the audience . . . . [T]he performance yesterday was the performance of an artist superbly gifted, physically a true figure of Wagnerian music drama, rarely eloquent and communicative in action and song.

When Flagstad appeared as Isolde four days later, *The New York Herald-Tribune*'s widely respected Lawrence Gilman marked the historic nature of the event:

> Last night's performance of "Tristan" at the Metropolitan was made unforgettable for its hearers by a transcendently beautiful and moving impersonation of Isolde—an embodiment so sensitively musical, so fine-grained in its imaginative and intellectual texture, so lofty in its pathos and simplicity, of so memorable a loveliness, that experienced opera-goers sought among their memories of legendary days to find its like. They did not find it.

Appearing in partnership with Melchior—who had made his Met debut in 1926, and had been coming annually to the house since 1928—Flagstad not only revived the performance of Wagner in New York but also, through her tremendous box-office success, played a major role in saving the company during the difficult later days of the Depression. Though she did sing regularly at London's Covent Garden, and spent much time in Norway, her artistic base was very much the United States. And so it came as a considerable shock when she decided, in the spring of 1941, to return to Norway to live. This decision, made at the request of her husband, a Norwegian businessman and collaborator with the Nazis, effectively removed her from the operatic and concert stage (despite a few engagements in Sweden and Switzerland) for the duration of the war.

4 The story of Flagstad's decision to essay this relatively minor role, new to her, is touchingly told by Decca producer John Culshaw in *Ring Resounding* (1967), his account of recording the Solti *Ring.*

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Upon the liberation of Norway, Flagstad's husband was arrested; he died awaiting trial. The resumption of her career was delayed by accusations—now generally agreed to be unfounded—of her cooperation with the Germans and her complicity in her husband's political activities. She finally began to sing again in 1947, appearing in Italy at La Scala and then in the United States at Carnegie Hall, at Covent Garden, and in South America.

Her first postwar recordings, made in London in 1948 and produced by the redoubtable Walter Legge, featured not just Wagner but also Purcell, Handel, Gluck, and Grieg.[5] She continued to record for EMI until the mid-1950s, when she moved to Decca, performing for that enterprising company Wagner, Handel, Brahms, and, of course, many Scandinavian songs.

Curiously, the greatest political opposition to Flagstad's postwar appearances came not from heavily bombed England but from the United States. There was much trouble over her San Francisco Opera engagement in 1949; her return to the Met was delayed until Rudolf Bing (himself an Austrian refugee from Hitler) took over as manager in 1950. Soon the controversy died down, and opera-lovers were saddened by her retirement from the American stage in 1952, when she still possessed close to her full vocal endowment. Though she was to return for a benefit all-Wagner concert with the Symphony of the Air three years later, her official farewell took place in Carnegie Hall, at a Sunday broadcast of the New York Philharmonic conducted by Bruno Walter. The program of this concert, which will long remain in the memories of those in the hall and of those across the country for whom the Philharmonic broadcasts were a treasured habit of life, included the *Götterdämmerung* Immolation Scene and the five Wesendonck Songs, with the piano accompaniment in the songs played most beautifully by Walter himself.[6]

After a brief flurry of activity in London—including, remarkably enough for the possessor of such a large voice, performances of Purcell's *Dido* at the 175-seat Mermaid Theatre—Flagstad returned again to Norway. In 1958 she became the director of the Norwegian Opera. Still in remarkably good vocal estate, to judge from her recordings and increasingly rare public appearances,[7] she soon began to suffer from bone cancer, and in 1962 she died in Oslo, by common consent the greatest Wagnerian singer of the century.

In the old days, I suppose, Hollywood might have made a cracking good movie about Flagstad. What more could you ask for than great tunes, the politics of war, and the triumph of a woman as a world figure?

5 Almost all Flagstad's 1948 recordings, along with slightly later material, are available, or recently were. The Wagner recordings provide perhaps the best approximation—under excellent recording conditions—of how the now more than fifty-year-old Flagstad actually sounded at the time of her return to Norway in 1941, just seven years earlier; these include a beautifully sung (and previously unreleased) "Liebestod" from *Tristan*. They are available in this country on Seraphim 1C-6158. The non-Wagner items, along with some of the material on the above set, were issued several years ago in Germany as Electrola 147-01 491/492. There can be no doubt that much choice Flagstad material, as is now true of the 1952 *Tristan* with Furtwängler, will appear shortly on compact disc.

6 Though this concert was indeed broadcast by CBS—which suggests that high-quality tape recordings made directly from the Carnegie Hall performance do exist—it has sadly never been commercially released. Nonetheless, the *Götterdämmerung* excerpt and the Wesendonck Songs have been available on various private labels over the years, and will doubtless reappear in the future. They are worth searching for.

7 One of these appearances was her 1957 London farewell recital, which took place in the Royal Albert Hall, with Sir Malcolm Sargent conducting the BBC Symphony Orchestra. This concert has been available on at least one private label recording; my copy is on Unique Opera Records [Edward J. Smith] 264.

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At the least, one might expect a wide-ranging biography of this great artist, a study that would discuss not just the personal events of her life and the reactions of her admirers but the artistic achievement which alone makes an artist's life worth writing about. In Flagstad's case, this would mean a close look at how she sounded and how she sang; in particular, it would mean a detailed consideration of her recordings, both commercial and private. This ideal biography would also discuss, in a kind of coda, just why the age of Flagstad seems an age never to be repeated.

Sadly, we do not have such a biography—and given the state of writing about great singers and musicians today, it is unlikely that we will have one any time soon. What we have instead is a recent book by Howard Vogt entitled *Flagstad: Singer of the Century.*[8] Mr. Vogt is described on the dust jacket as a singer and a librarian. As a singer he "sings professionally mainly in the eastern United States, where he is especially noted for his interpretations of German Lieder and Mozart roles"; as a librarian, he ran the Bloomfield, New Jersey, Public Library until his retirement in 1984. He was also the founder, in 1969, of the Bloomfield Opera Theatre.

At the outset it must be said that Mr. Vogt gets the broad outlines of his subject right. It need hardly be remarked that he gives Flagstad every credit for the opulence, purity, reliability, and beauty of her voice. Moreover, he recognizes that even her quiet behavior on the stage, called uninvolved by those whose tastes run to theatricality, concealed—and conveyed—a profound involvement with the roles she sang. When he deals with personal matters, he understands Flagstad's reclusiveness and her loyalty; he understands, too, how unwilling she was to change her mind.

Despite the general soundness of Mr. Vogt's conclusions, the fact seems inescapable that, whatever his qualifications, he has arranged and written his book as a fan, not as a professional. From his first hearing of Flagstad as Elsa in *Lohengrin* at the Met in 1937 to his trip to Oslo in 1982 to attend the unveiling of a memorial statue to her, his concern has apparently been his feelings about this artist. He is quite clear that at the center of his life and feelings is Flagstad: his book's preface begins with a confession which, in its total preoccupation with one glorious heroine, places Mr. Vogt in the world of fandom:

> After I turned fifty, in 1974, I found myself looking back over the years and reliving experiences that had shaped my life. My most vivid memory was both aural and visual: the voice and presence of the Norwegian soprano, Kirsten Flagstad. This book has its origins in that memory.

As much as his book discusses Flagstad's personal tribulations and her public appearances, Mr. Vogt still finds time and space to discuss his own relation to the star:

> In 1939, the year I turned fifteen, I wrote to Kirsten Flagstad and asked her if she would send me an autographed photograph of herself as Isolde. I was planning to stage *Tristan* in a puppet theatre and I wanted the picture for costume details. She sent it to me, signed "Sincerely, Kirsten Flagstad." I was overwhelmed. That photograph became my most prized possession, but the puppet production never materialized. I was at that age when dreams are plentiful.

At the end of his book, Mr. Vogt takes many hundreds of words to describe his work at the Bloomfield Library and his founding of the Bloomfield Opera Theatre. Somewhat earlier, he is able to find space to describe his educational career, including his experience as a part-time graduate student in library science at Rutgers. This *curriculum vitae* is immediately followed by paragraphs detailing his reactions to Birgit Nilsson, whom he calls "Flagstad's worthy successor." "I think of gold when I hear Flagstad," Mr. Vogt writes, "and silver when I hear

8 *Flagstad: Singer of the Century,* by Howard Vogt, with a foreword by Jessye Norman; Secker & Warburg, 300 pages, £20.

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Nilsson." Inexplicably, after this discussion of Nilsson and of a 1960 performance of *Die Walküre* in Chicago which Mr. Vogt attended, he goes on to talk about all the wonderful operas he saw in Chicago around this time, and about his concert-presentation activities in nearby De Kalb.

But when the reader wants to know important personal material about Flagstad and her family, Mr. Vogt sometimes fails to supply the goods. Thus he never accounts for the fate of Flagstad's only child, Else Hall, after 1962: if it were not for Mr. Vogt's mention of her as the "late mother" of Flagstad's grandson, the reader would be entirely ignorant of her death some time in the last two decades. An equally serious lapse is Mr. Vogt's failure to discuss the *musical* role played in Flagstad's development by her long-time accompanist, Edwin McArthur. McArthur, who died this past year at the age of eighty, was a shining example of an immensely gifted musician who fell between the cracks in musical life. Closely associated with Flagstad from 1935 on, he was not only her accompanist and coach but a conducting protegé on whose behalf she made many enemies in the course of attempting to advance his career. From the recorded evidence it is clear that McArthur was a remarkably sensitive and fluent pianist; it is equally clear that his conducting was solid and dependable, and sometimes something much more than that. For his pains on behalf of Flagstad, McArthur was forgotten during his life; indeed, there is no entry on him in the voluminous *New Grove Dictionary of American Music* (1986).

It is not that Mr. Vogt ignores McArthur; he gives him much credit for his devotion, and even for his musical accomplishments. But nowhere is there consideration of what *musically* passed between Flagstad and her young assistant. Those familiar with the ways in which great singers work know that they greatly depend on the artistic advice of those they trust. Were we to have some understanding of McArthur's role in Flagstad's art, we could begin the necessary task of recognizing him for the considerable artist he must have been.

The most serious flaw in Mr. Vogt's book, and what finally disqualifies it totally as the needed study of Flagstad, is his neglect of her recordings; his book lacks even a discography. Not until the last page does he make clear why he disdains this consideration:

> Kirsten Flagstad's voice is preserved more or less faithfully on records. But the total, unsurpassable impact of a Flagstad performance is recorded only in the memories of those who heard her and saw her on the stage.

This will not do. Until the present century, the greatest tragedy of performers' lives was the inescapable result of their aging and the loss of their powers: the good they did died with them. Now, with recordings, this hitherto rigid ground rule has been mitigated. We know Caruso today by the evidence of his art; we know his predecessors, no matter how great they may have been, solely by the testimony of their fans.

In the case of Flagstad, there is every reason to think that her recordings give a remarkably accurate picture of how she sounded throughout her international career.[9] Just because her acting was so inward and so concentrated on directing attention to the creation of character by vocal means, Flagstad was well served by the phonograph. I myself can vouch for the fact that the Flagstad whose recordings I bought in the early 1950s sounded exactly like the Flagstad I

9 It is even possible, because she made recordings of her repertory for more than a decade after World War I, to hear how she sounded in the years before her fame. One LP transfer of sixteen items, ranging from folksongs to Grieg, was available shortly after Flagstad's death, as Harvest H-1004. These performances suggest that the size and strength of her voice were not a sudden accretion just prior to her discovery in the mid-1930s but had instead been gathering throughout the 1920s. A certain darkness of timbre and accuracy of intonation in the youthful Flagstad suggest the mature artist; what is more, in all these early recordings there is a quality of rapt yet radiant introspection that was to be the hallmark of her greatest performances.

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had just heard in the opera house. All in all, it is difficult to escape the impression that Mr. Vogt's lack of interest in Flagstad's recordings has more to do with what he sees as the preciousness of his own memories in the opera house than with any real shortcomings in the records themselves.

Because of the inadequacies in Mr. Vogt's book, it remains necessary for the reader interested in Flagstad to go back to the two books which have for many years provided the basic information on her life and career. These are *The Flagstad Manuscript* (1952), her own memoirs (as told to the music critic Louis Biancolli), and Edwin McArthur's *Flagstad: A Personal Memoir* (1965). Both books—McArthur's perhaps even more than Flagstad's—ring true and clarify matters of dates and relationships. They are both stronger on character than music, and their greatest virtue is their lack of sentimentality.

And so the questions flood in. Why was Flagstad so great? What exactly was her role in conveying the music dramas she sang? Why, with the passage of more than a generation, has she had no successors?

It is easy to say that her greatness was the result of her talent: a pure musicality allied to a beautiful voice, with both musicality and voice allowed to grow slowly over years of relatively undemanding appearances in light repertory performed in provincial surroundings. And then there was her contact with great musicians, among them George Szell (who worked as her coach prior to her Metropolitan appearances), Artur Bodanzky, Edwin McArthur, and then, after the war, Wilhelm Furtwängler and Bruno Walter. It also seems true that another beneficent factor in Flagstad's greatness was the way in which operatic life was conducted prior to the 1950s. Ocean travel and long engagements made a singer's life less strenuous than it is in today's world of one night La Scala, the next night Covent Garden.

As I reflect on my recent experience of listening to tens of Flagstad's LPs, it becomes clear to me that to an unparalleled extent in this century she *completed* the great works of Wagner in which she specialized. Wagner did not write for coquettish soubrettes, nor did he write for fiery prima donnas. Instead, drawing on folk legends, he wrote for women who could in their own bodies and in their own voices personify the womanly—not simply feminine—qualities associated with physical strength and surface placidity concealing deep passion. Isolde, Sieglinde, Brünnhilde, even Kundry: these are larger-than-life heroines, mythic archetypes whose *raison d'être* is not transient attractiveness but rather what used to be called the future of the race. In his written scores Wagner suggested what he needed; it took the heroic reserves of strength and concealed passion of Kirsten Flagstad to make Wagner's design concrete, and in this concreteness lay her true greatness.

Why has Flagstad had no successors?[10] I have mentioned above the slowness of her development and the relative physical ease in which she conducted her career. We live now in a world that worships youth; and that which it worships, it exploits. Young talents, nowadays in any case poorly trained, are given punishingly difficult roles, which must be sung in enormous houses run by administrators whose backgrounds and qualifications include everything except direct musical experience. At our greatest opera houses, richly talented conductors, those inestimable influences on the greatest singers, are seen as troublemakers, and are distinctly unwelcome.

But we do have our records, and in the case of Wagnerian singing, like the parchments which preserved the culture of antiquity across the Dark Ages, these records have much to tell us. Nowhere is this more true than in the case of Kirsten Flagstad.

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10 It is with some trepidation that I state here that I do not consider Birgit Nilsson, despite her bounteous voice, a true successor—i.e., replacement—for Flagstad. Nilsson sang her roles often wonderfully, though also often with faulty intonation; in the deepest sense she did not, as did Flagstad, become the characters she portrayed.

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The anguishes of E. M. Cioran

by Roger Kimball

"What a torment to be ordinary, a man among men!"
—E. M. Cioran

There are certain cultural figures who manage to make metaphysical gloominess the centerpiece and inspiration of their life's work. Though vigorously atheistic, they often resort to a quasi-religious terminology to express their obsession with the transcience and absurdities of life, man's capacity for evil and cruelty, and the ubiquity of suffering in this imperfect and ephemeral world. Capitalizing on mankind's hearty appetite for self-dramatization and self-pity, they expatiate, often with considerable eloquence, on the pointlessness and corruption of all human endeavors and institutions, elaborating a seductive vision of doom. The darker strains of Romanticism—one thinks especially of figures like Novalis—provide one important source for this tendency; Schopenhauer's philosophical pessimism provides another. In modern times, most devotees of the genre have also injected a heavy dose of irony into their pathos, transforming Romantic despair into a species of hyperconscious self-mockery even as they pursue their love affair with the void; misguided idealism gives way to a brittle, nihilistic cynicism. It is only natural that the title of Oswald Spengler's dour masterpiece, *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* ("The Decline of the West"), should emerge as the insistent rallying cry of these fervent partisans of disillusionment.

The Rumanian-born essayist and aphorist Emile M. Cioran is a minor but thoroughly typical contemporary representative of this tradition of metaphysical futility. The son of a Greek Orthodox priest, Cioran was born in a village in the Carpathians in 1911. He studied philosophy at Bucharest University, winning a scholarship from the French Institute there in 1937. This took him to Paris, where he has since lived and worked. He began writing in French only in 1947, apparently expending great efforts to master the language. "It would be the narrative of a nightmare," he confesses with characteristic understatement, "were I to give you a detailed account of the history of my relations with this borrowed idiom." He published his first book, *Précis de décomposition* (translated as *A Short History of Decay*), in 1949 and has since published several volumes of essays and aphorisms.[1]

While hardly a household name, Cioran has attracted a staunch coterie of admirers in both Europe and the United States. In this country, his popularity, such as it is, was sparked largely by the early efforts of that unparalleled impresario of the new, Susan Sontag. In 1968, she contributed an intro-

1 Cioran's other collections are *Les Syllogismes de l'amertume* (1952), *La Tentation d'exister* (1956), *Histoire et utopie* (1960), *La Chute dans le temps* (1964), and *De l'inconvénient d'être né* (1973).

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ductory essay to *The Temptation to Exist,* Cioran's first book translated into English.[2] Describing him as "one of the most *delicate* minds of real power writing today," Miss Sontag touts him as the "most distinguished figure" now writing in the anti-systematic tradition of "Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and Wittgenstein"—a tradition, she tells us, for which "thinking" (the quotation marks are hers) "is redefined as worthless unless it is an extreme act."

Be this as it may, Miss Sontag's estimation of Cioran's importance is by now commonplace among readers with a taste for his brand of high-pitched, deliberately provocative intellectual marauding. "Thinking Against Oneself" and "On a Winded Civilization": the titles of the opening two essays of *The Temptation to Exist* may be said to epitomize the mood and general outlook of not only this volume but all of Cioran's work. Here, as elsewhere, what Cioran offers are not reasoned arguments or sustained reflections but a series of highly charged *aperçus* on the debacle of Western civilization, the fate of the intellectual in contemporary society, the end of the novel, the virtues of tyranny, the future of utopia, and other edifying topics. Yet behind these ostensible themes lies his one real abiding concern, a concern that Miss Sontag sums up admirably. "Cioran's subject: on being a *mind,* a consciousness tuned to the highest pitch of refinement." "In Cioran's writings," she adds, "the mind is a voyeur. But not of 'the world.' Of itself." With these last characterizations especially, we come close to the center of Cioran's thought.

The recent appearance of a translation of *Histoire et utopie*[3]— a slim collection of six essays meditating on the virtues and liabilities of the utopian impulse, the imperfections of democracy, and the primacy of hate and rancor in the inventory of human emotions—offers an appropriate occasion on which to reassess Cioran's achievement. Is he the embattled intellectual hero that Miss Sontag presents, a lonely mind of "real power" courageously recording important truths that are too unpalatable for the majority of thinkers to acknowledge? Or is he more in the way of an intellectual *poseur,* a metaphysical aesthete who anatomizes his self-inflicted agonies not for the sake of any presumed truth but merely in order to provide himself with ever more exquisite spectacles of disbelief? Almost everything Cioran has written points to the latter conclusion.

Cioran's appeal does not rest only on the substance of his position; equally—if not more—important is his style, his epigrammatic tautness. His advertised labors with the French language have resulted in a style that blends an almost Olympian coolness and intellectuality with the appearance of passion bordering, at times, on hysteria. Like so much about Cioran, it is essentially an adolescent style: high-handed, confessional, histrionic, but nevertheless full of energy. His habitual use of the royal we—one of his most obvious rhetorical borrowings from Nietzsche—helps invest his writing with a patina of authority; and if one discounts context and forgets about picayune things like meaning, Cioran can be eminently quotable. But he clearly values the *effect* of his style over consistency of argument. One does not have to read far in his work before understanding Susan Sontag's enthusiasm: in Cioran she found a kindred spirit, an inspiration, a writer who preserved the appearance of serious intellectual inquiry while giving absolute priority to rhetorical gestures, verbal extravagances, and modishly provocative poses. Nor are English readers denied much of the spectacle. Cioran has been extremely well served by his main English translator, the poet Richard Howard, who has a remarkable feel for the appro-

2 Readers who do not own *The Temptation to Exist* can find Miss Sontag's essay reprinted under the title "'Thinking Against Oneself': Reflections on Cioran" in her book *Styles of Radical Will* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1969).

3 *History and Utopia,* by E. M. Cioran, translated by Richard Howard; Seaver, 118 pages, $16.95. The six essays translated and collected in this volume appeared previously in various journals.

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priate cadences and vocabulary with which to render Cioran's self-consciously "brilliant," overworked prose.

It is obviously terribly important for Cioran to present himself as a Romantic figure *manqué,* a kind of Rimbaud with a degree in philosophy and more staying power. He casually describes himself as "prowling around the Absolute" and informs us that "the only minds which seduce us are the minds which have destroyed themselves trying to give their lives a meaning." He likes to see himself as an intellectually inclined aesthete who has had the courage and lucidity to see through everything, especially his former ideals. For example, while he now finds poetry "a vision of singsong and nullity, of fetid mysteries and affectations," it is essential that we understand that he was once a great lover of poetry: "I have loved it at the expense of my health; I anticipated succumbing to my worship of it." His superior insight and tenacity, we are meant to understand, competing with a passionate aesthetic sensibility, allow him to occupy this lonely place above the blandishments of poetry.

Cioran's favorite rhetorical gambit—his predominant bid for attention—is disarmingly simple: he takes conventional wisdom about politics, culture, or ethics and inverts it. In the hallowed tradition of *épater la bourgeoisie,* he sets out to shock, to unsettle, to provoke. Not that there is anything particularly new in Cioran's painstakingly contentious statements; mostly, they read like formulaic declarations of existentialist angst and venom. True, when one first dips into his work, it can seem brashly outrageous. How extraordinary to be told that philosophy is the "privilege of . . . *biologically* superficial peoples," to discover that "we spend the prime of our sleepless nights in mentally mangling our enemies, rending their entrails, wringing their veins, trampling each organ to mush," or to learn that at the age of twenty Cioran supposed "that to become the enemy of the human race was the highest dignity to which one might aspire."

Similarly, one cannot help being brought up short when Cioran looks back to his native Rumania only to tell us that "I owe it not only my finest, my surest failures, but also this talent for masking my cowardice and hoarding my compunctions," or summarizes his feelings about Paris with the observation that "this city, which I would exchange for no other in the world, is for that very reason the source of my misfortunes . . . . I often regret that wars have spared it, that it has not perished like so many others. Destroyed, it would have rid me of the happiness of living here . . . . I shall never forgive Paris for having bound me to space, for making me *from somewhere.*"

After two or three essays, such displays lose whatever novelty they originally had; and after slogging through several books, one realizes that Cioran's pose as intellectual provocateur is little more than a mask for a series of repetitious clichés. Thus he is everywhere at pains to extol dreams and madness as bastions of freedom and genius. In "Thinking Against Oneself" he writes that "we are all geniuses when we dream, the butcher the poet's equal there . . . . Only the madman enjoys the privilege of passing smoothly from a nocturnal to a daylight existence." And a bit later: "It is the madman in us who forces us into adventure; once he abandons us, we are lost. . . . We cannot be *normal* and *alive* at the same time."

Beggars, too, are favored objects of Cioran's admiration, for in his view the beggar's "thought is resolved into his being and his being into his thought. He *has* nothing, he *is* himself, he endures: to live on a footing with eternity is to live from day to day, from hand to mouth." It's the old image of the poor fool turning out to be wiser than the educated philistine. Cioran treats us to this one a good deal. In an essay entitled "Beyond the Novel," he admonishes us to dispense with the genre because it is too bookish and mundane to deal with what really matters.

> What interest can a mere life afford? What interest, books inspired by other books or minds dependent on other minds? Only the illiterate have given me that *frisson* of being

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> which indicates the presence of truth. Carpathian shepherds have made a much deeper impression upon me than the professors of Germany, the wits of Paris. I have seen Spanish beggars, and I should like to have become their hagiographer. They had no need to invent a life for themselves: they *existed*; which does not happen in civilization.

What *does* happen in civilization? Cioran never really says. But one wonders if it really matters to him. As his quasi-metaphysical, yet nowhere defined, use of the term "existence" here suggests, he is not against using words primarily as emotional embroidery. And what about the "truth" that these illiterate Spanish peasants are said to possess? In another essay he scornfully summarizes his feelings about that dinosaur with a phrase: "The Truth? An adolescent fad or symptom of senility."

Clearly, Cioran's thought rests largely on a Romantic opposition of instinct to intellect, on a *preference* for instinct over intellect. "Whatever emanates from the inferior zones of our nature," he writes, "is invested with strength, whatever comes from below stimulates: we invariably produce and perform better out of jealousy and greed than out of nobility and disinterestedness." Hence his suspicion of reason as "the rust of our vitality," and his claim that "we are born to exist, not to know; to be, not to assert ourselves. Knowledge, having irritated and stimulated our appetite for power, will lead us inexorably to our ruin . . . . [K]nowledge taints the economy of a human being." No arguments are provided for these sentiments, possibly because, as he notes elsewhere, he is convinced that "the dynasty of intelligibility" is drawing to a close. What use are reasons and arguments in a realm of chaos and unintelligibility?

But though Cioran appears as an intellectual campaigning against the hegemony of the intellect, he is by no means given to a worship of the body or man's physical life. His paean to instinct does not preserve him from vituperative expressions of contempt for the body. "In what grease, what pestilence the spirit has taken up its abode! This body, whose every pore eliminates enough stench to infect space, is no more than a mass of ordure through which circulates a scarcely less ignoble blood, no more than a tumor which disfigures the geometry of the globe. Supernatural disgust! No one approaches without revealing to me, despite himself, the stage of his putrefaction, the livid destiny which awaits him."

It cannot be said that Cioran has improved or particularly matured with age. One of the most recent of his books to be translated into English, *The Trouble With Being Born* (1976), a collection of aphorisms published in French in 1973, strikes one as a series of rambling, disconnected thoughts culled from the journal of a well-read but deeply troubled teenager—that, or a collection of rejected entries from Woody Allen's parody of Kafka. Here are a few more or less randomly chosen tidbits:

> Three in the morning. I realize this second, then this one, then the next: I draw up the balance sheet for each minute. And why all this? *Because I was born.* It is a special type of sleeplessness that produces the indictment of birth.

> Physical need of dishonor. How I should have liked to be the executioner's son!

> If disgust for the world conferred sanctity of itself, I fail to see how I could avoid canonization.

> A book is a postponed suicide.

> The right to suppress everyone that bothers us should rank first in the constitution of the ideal State.

> Sometimes I wish I were a cannibal—less for the pleasure of eating someone than for the pleasure of vomiting him.

It is easy, is it not, to see why Susan Sontag describes this man as "one of the most *delicate* minds of real power writing today"?

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Cioran's attitude—not to say attitudinizing—toward violence and disaster epitomizes his efforts at self-dramatization. Often, he pauses to vent his spleen on himself. "I have hated myself in all the objects of my hatreds, I have imagined miracles of annihilation, pulverized my hours, tested the gangrenes of the intellect." But he saves most of his energy for others. In "Odyssey of Rancor" we are told that by nature man is saturated with murderous resentment. Hate is presented as mankind's guiding principle, yet most men, especially in the civilized West, "are not equal to their hatred." Only this keeps them from destroying one another at once. The "need to kill, inscribed in every cell," has been stymied by civilization, and this has vitiated man's primitive vigor and led to decadence and decline. For Cioran, "we become *good* only by destroying the best of our nature," and, similarly, "our imaginations function only in hope of others' misfortune." "We"? "Our"? How easily grammar insinuates complicity!

In essays like "Russia and the Virus of Liberty" and "Learning from the Tyrants" (both of which, with "Odyssey of Rancor," appear in *History and Utopia*), Cioran elevates the themes of violence and hatred from the individual to the social and political level. Democratic liberalism appears not as a social and political achievement of the first order but as a concession to weakness and decay. "Freedoms prosper only in a sick body politic: tolerance and impotence are synonyms." Since he believes that "the passion to reduce others to the status of objects" is the key to understanding politics, he has profound respect for political tyrants. Reflecting on the Russian tradition from the time of the tsars down through Lenin and Stalin, for example, he tells us that "they were, as are these recent tyrants who have replaced them, closer to a geological vitality than to human anemia, despots perpetuating in our time the primordial sap, the primordial spoilage, and triumphing over us all by their inexhaustible reserves of chaos."

Though he assures us that he "abominates tyrants," Cioran also admits that he "harbors a weakness for tyrants"—largely, one suspects, because he thinks that "a world without tyrants would be as boring as a zoo without hyenas." Indeed, he seems to believe that we all would behave as tyrants if only we had the courage, lucidity, and forcefulness. Hence tyrants are said to "reveal us to ourselves, they incarnate and illustrate our secrets." And hence Cioran regards the asperity and violence of his writing as a substitute for the physical violence he has been incapable of perpetrating: "Unable to render myself worthy of them [the tyrants] by action, I hoped to do so by words, by the practice of sophism and enormity: to be as odious with the means of mind as they were with those of power, to devastate by language, to blow up the word and with it the world, to explode with one and the other, and finally to collapse under their debris!" Moreover, he envisions a great tyrant on the horizon, one who will forge the nations of the earth into a single entity. "The scattered human herd will be united under the guardianship of one pitiless shepherd, a kind of planetary monster before whom nations will prostrate themselves in an alarm bordering on ecstasy." Somehow, though, the decidedly unecstatic alarm one feels reading such professions is not assuaged by his blithe identification of Hitler as "the rough draft of our future," the harbinger of this envisioned "planetary monster."

Given his infatuation with exile, alienation, and historical catastrophe, one could have predicted that Cioran would sooner or later find himself moved to write about Judaism and the Jews. Among other things, "A People of Solitaries," his essay on the Jews in *The Temptation to Exist,* is a perfect example of his simplifying hostility toward religion.

> For them, eternity was a pretext for convulsions, a spasm: vomiting imprecations and anthems, they wriggled before the eyes of a God insatiable for hysterias. This was a religion in which man's relations with his Creator are exhausted in a war of epithets, in a tension which keeps him from pondering,

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> from emphasizing and thereby from remedying his differences, a religion based on adjectives, effects of language, and in which style constitutes the only hyphen between heaven and earth.

Not, one hastens to add, that he is much better on Christianity. "[W]e"—that inveigling plural again—"yawn over the Cross . . . To attempt to save Christianity, to prolong its career, would not occur to us; on occasion it awakens our . . . indifference." (The ellipses are Cioran's.)

But of course his chief interest in Judaism is not in its religious dimension but in the stereotype of the Jew as victim and scapegoat. And here, as in his frequent invocation of "biological capital" in other essays, Cioran betrays a species of race thinking that is tantamount to racism. For him, the Jews occupy a distinct ontological category that makes them different *toto genere* from "ordinary" human beings: "Let someone else do them the insult of making 'meaningful' statements about them! I cannot bring myself to do so: to apply our standards to them is to strip them of their privileges, to turn them into mere mortals, an ordinary variety of the human type." Professed admiration becomes a cloak for an extraordinarily patronizing presumptuousness. Did the Jews suffer untold barbarities at the hands of the Nazis? Well, Cioran airily dismisses the question, advising us to "leave aside regrets, or delirium . . . . The instinct of self-preservation mars individuals and collectivities alike." Perhaps it was this last observation that led even Miss Sontag to admit that Cioran's discussion of the Jews "displays a startling moral insensitivity to the contemporary aspects of his theme."

It pleases Miss Sontag to describe Cioran's politics as "conservative." But even the briefest peek at his political animadversions shows that this is a complete misnomer. Cioran has no more desire to conserve or preserve traditional social and political arrangements than—well, than the tyrants he so lovingly eulogizes. Not that it is easy to determine what Cioran's politics are. "Tradition," "heritage," "democracy," "liberalism": these are terms of abuse for Cioran. But he is a connoisseur of inconsistency, capable of castigating Marxism on one page for "the sin of optimism" while elsewhere championing Communism as "the only reality to which one might still subscribe, if one harbors even a wisp of illusion as to the future." He declares in one place that "life without utopia is suffocating" yet insists in another that "we shall never praise utopias sufficiently for having denounced the crimes of ownership, the horror property represents, the calamities it causes. Great or small, the owner is corrupted, sullied in his essence . . . . To own even a broom, to count anything at all, as *our* property, is to participate in the general infamy."

But if there is a wild inconsistency of argument in Cioran's work, there is nonetheless an almost rigid consistency of attitude; Cioran's positions and opinions shift from page to page; contradictions abound; but throughout it all he maintains his stance as extreme philosophical anarchist: "Bluntly: my rebellion is a faith to which I subscribe without believing in it," he writes, reasoning that "since the Absolute corresponds to a meaning we have not been able to cultivate, let us surrender to all rebellions: they will end by turning against themselves, against us . . . ." And this, you understand, is meant as a recommendation.

In a writer as unsystematic and (one assumes) deliberately inconsistent as Cioran, it will perhaps seem idle to look for the presuppositions of his position. But lurking behind much of his writing is the essentially Romantic glorification of absolute freedom —the *confusion,* that is to say, of indeterminate spontaneity with genuine freedom, which has meaning only when limited and determined by particular choices. Throughout Cioran's work one encounters the idea that *any* definite thought or action is an encroachment upon freedom that ought ideally to be resisted. "The sphere of consciousness shrinks in action," he writes in the lead essay of *The Temptation to Exist:*

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> no one who acts can lay claim to the universal, for to act is to cling to the properties of being at the expense of being itself, to a form of reality to reality's detriment . . . . If we would regain our freedom, we must shake off the burden of sensation, no longer react to the world by our senses, break our bonds . . . . The only free mind is the one that, pure of all intimacy with beings or objects, plies its own vacuity.

Elsewhere he speaks of "the illusory character, the nullity of all action" and concludes that "freedom can be manifested only in the void of beliefs, in the absence of axioms, and only where the laws have no more authority than a hypothesis." In other words, according to Cioran, freedom can be manifested only where it is impossible. For him, freedom is the elusive corollary of "Being" or "the Absolute," terms whose emptiness is not remedied simply by being capitalized.

At bottom, Cioran's main theme, the theme that he returns to again and again, the theme that more than any other has endeared him to leftist intellectuals like Miss Sontag and allowed them to overlook his otherwise unacceptable politics, is hatred of the West, its institutions, heritage, and legacy. Describing the West as "a sweet-smelling rottenness, a perfumed corpse," Cioran asserts that, having shed brutality, the West has also lost its strength. "Once subjects, they [the nations of the West] have become objects, forever dispossessed of that luminescence, that admirable megalomania which had hitherto protected them from the irreparable." Again and again he proclaims the end of Western culture. Even now the West is "preparing for its end," he tells us; "let us envisage chaos. Already, most of us are resigned to it."

Predictably, bourgeois society, being an enclave of liberal democratic thought, comes in for special criticism. In "Letter to a Faraway Friend," the opening essay in *History and Utopia,* Cioran enlarges on the "lacunae of bourgeois society," coyly assuring his "faraway friend" that such a society is not "entirely and absolutely displeasing to me—you know my weakness for the horrible—but the expenditure of insensitivity it requires to be endured is out of all proportion to my reserves of cynicism." Expatiating on the "curse" that has fallen upon the liberal West, he asks why the West "produces only these businessmen, these shopkeepers, these racketeers with their blank stares and atrophied smiles, to be met with everywhere, in Italy as in France, in England as in Germany? Is it with such vermin as this that a civilization so delicate and complex must come to an end?" Of course, anti-Western animus has been a stock-in-trade of fashionable intellectuals at least since the middle of the nineteenth century. But Cioran's vitriol attains a rare level of savagery and contempt. And one cannot help wondering if there isn't something in the rejoinder that Cioran quotes from an unnamed friend in "Some Blind Alleys: A Letter": "'The West—you aren't even part of it.'"

Especially in his earlier work, Cioran's rhetoric recalls no one so much as Nietzsche, and one is not surprised to find that Miss Sontag observes—not without embarrassment, one suspects, for the observation cannot but dim her subject's claim to originality—that Nietzsche "set down almost all Cioran's position almost a century ago." In fact, though, this is only half true. There is no doubt that Cioran was deeply impressed by Nietzsche; his writing is permeated by the philosopher's themes, his perfervid prose, even his distinctive locutions and images. Nietzsche's infatuation with violence and power, his use of physiological metaphors to explain art and other cultural phenomena, his deliberate inversion of inherited moral categories, his vision of a stance "beyond good and evil": all this and more reappears predigested in Cioran's works.

But Cioran is less Nietzsche's disciple than his ape. He adopts the extravagant rhetorical gestures, glories in shocking conventional wisdom, and clearly would like to describe himself, as did Nietzsche, as intellectual "dynamite." But when one comes to examine the substance of Cioran's thought,

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one discovers that on almost every issue his position—insofar as he adopts a consistent position—is completely at odds with Nietzsche's teaching. Miss Sontag herself admits that "what's missing in Cioran's work is anything parallel to Nietzsche's heroic effort to surmount nihilism." Since the effort to surmount nihilism forms the core of Nietzsche's mature thought, its utter absence in Cioran's work already marks an important divergence from Nietzsche.

More generally, Cioran's gloomy flirtations with the void are diametrically opposed to Nietzsche's efforts to overcome the life-poisoning pessimism of (as he puts it in *The Gay Science*) the man who "revenges himself on all things by forcing his own image, the image of his torture, on them, branding them with it." Cioran's work proceeds from a disgust—or at least the pretense of a disgust—with life, especially the life of civilized man. Despite his own excesses, at the center of Nietzsche's thought is the ambition to woo modern man back from his disenchantment with life. "I should very much like," Nietzsche writes, "to do something that would make the thought of life even a hundred times more appealing." For Cioran, revenge is the lugubrious tonic that provides life with its chief fascination; for Nietzsche "the spirit of revenge" constitutes the main impediment to man's self-affirmation. Behind all the bravura, there is something terribly pathetic about Cioran. "What a torment to be ordinary, a man among men!" he has exclaimed. But, as he put it in one of his most insightful observations, "nothing is more commonplace than the *ersatz* troubled soul, for everything can be learned, even *angst*."

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Poems *by Jane Kenyon, Eric Pankey & Michael J. Rosen*

The three Susans

Ancient maples mingle over us, leaves
the color of pomegranates.
The days are warm with honey light,
but the last two nights have finished
every garden in the village.

The provident have left green tomatoes
to ripen on newspaper in the darkness of sheds.
The peppers were already in.
Now there will be no more corn.

I let myself through the wrought iron gate
of the graveyard, and—meaning to exclude
the dog—I close it after me. But he runs
to the other end, and jumps the stone
wall overlooking Elbow Pond.

Someone's been working here. The broken
stones are upright, the fissures
mortared crudely. Small fading flags
lean beside the stones of veterans.

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Here Samuel Smith lay down at last
with his three wives, all named Susan.
I had to see it for myself. They died
in their sixties, one outliving him.
So why do I feel indignant? He suffered.
Love, and the Smiths' peculiar fame
"to nothingness do sink." And further on
the Sleepers live up to their name.

The dog cocks his leg on a stone.
But animals do not mock, and the dead
may be glad to have life breaking in.

The sun drops low over the pond.
Long shadows move out from the stones,
and a chill rises from the moss,
prompt as a deacon. And at Keats's grave
in the Protestant cemetery in Rome
it is already night,
and wild cats are stalking in the moat.

—Jane Kenyon

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Driving south from Iowa City

for Jan Weismiller

The whole day

lost suddenly to headlights,
to the roadside weeds that arch
as if they hold night's still weight.

Rivers we cross go unseen—
the Salt, the Skunk, some narrow
bridge that's all sway and rattle.

The air's mineral, acrid,
as if it is being pulled
down into the hard, cracked fields.

Tonight the night is all rain,
not yet falling, elemental,
gathering itself until it breaks.

—*Eric Pankey*

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Window washing

Close as any embrace, we press together—
you on a ladder tipped against the house,
me, crouched inside the kitchen sink—
twelve mullioned panes within our grasp.

We wave at—in truth, *against*—each other,
in patterns the weathered casements circumscribe,
like all the other greetings and departures
they've witnessed, within their manageable squares.

Yet blurry gestures aren't what we read,
nor what their insulated touch confers
as we settle on one unyielding spot,
but the grim opacity of grime, Windex,

and webs, streaked like ambiguity
between us. Oh, and you, of course, must scan
(a second time?) the random sheet from the morning
edition, wadded behind your clenching hand.

Whatever incident your side reports,
my own opposing view insists, "No Reason-
able Offer Will Be Refused," illustrated
with a waterbed that grants untroubled sleep.

Finally, there's tapping, a finger's accusation,
a smudge someone must own. More smearing, mist
and scratching . . . until we see the fault, if it must
be someone's, is the rain's, acid-etched

like habit on the glass. Next comes the instant
when the eyes shift from the wiping hand, from the bled
and sodden news, to the bright unblemished glass,
bedazzled by the sudden reflection there:

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the mulberry I should have let you fell,
the marble countertops you knew I'd stain.
Another glance replaces this, when the glass
conducts our gazes like incidents of light,

and our heads, tilting, doubting their eyes, perhaps,
survey the glints of sun. But that perfection
breaks, breaking as we say the sun breaks
among clouds, when the window allows the eye

to dissolve the glass and its little solipsisms,
and to see beyond it, as though our furious swipes
had been at nothing, at shade or at air, at some
foreseen inclemency, at something behind,

and not between us, where, now one face is framed
between the draperies we shouldn't have bought,
and one, among the vines of unnamed ivies.
So satisfied, before the next set,

there is one other glance the eyes catch
—at least, my eye caught yours—when the cleansed window
permits a look that is, just as we start
our small descents, adoring, inside and out.

—Michael J. Rosen

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Architecture

Frank Gehry in vogue

by Diana Ketcham

This season, the wheel of architectural fashion has swung round to Frank Gehry. To many, the work of this California maverick strikes a note that seems fresh and honest in a field glutted by the studied and slick. A frequently told story from the colorful Gehry legend concerns a neighbor who felt passionately enough about the architect's Santa Monica house to put a bullet through a window. Such vigilantism is in keeping with Gehry's image as a wild man of the West, wielding his bag of carpenter's tools instead of a computer printout and offending refined tastes with his constructions in raw wood, corrugated metal, and chain link.

Now fifty-nine, Gehry has been pursuing experimental design since the Sixties and has long enjoyed a following in the Los Angeles art community. But from the breathless press he has received this year, one would think Gehry had only now been discovered. For 1987 was the year Gehry's undergound reputation exploded into pop celebrity, owing largely to the first retrospective of his work. Organized by Mildred Friedman of the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, this show has been a hit in museums across the country, coming to a triumphant final rest this spring at the institution most closely associated with Gehry's role in the art world, the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA).[1] In June, Gehry will be the centerpiece of an exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art entitled "Deconstructivist Architecture," for which its curator, Philip Johnson, has predicted an influence equal to his legendary 1932 "International Style" show. Gehry's formal anointing by MOMA and the Walker Art Center has coincided with national commissions at totally new levels of scale and ambition, including a high-rise complex in Dallas, a psychiatric institute for Yale in New Haven, an office tower atop Madison Square Garden in New York, and a waterfront development for Boston's Fan Pier.

The popular press's response to these events has elevated Gehry from his former status as a California eccentric to "one of the two or three most important architects of the late Modern generation," as *Time* magazine put it. He may also be "the most misunderstood architect in the United States" (according to *The New York Times*), but he is nevertheless assumed to have been great all

1 "The Architecture of Frank Gehry" has been on display since February 16 at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles and will continue there until May 15. It was previously shown at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, the Contemporary Arts Museum in Houston, the Art Gallery at Harbor Front in Toronto, and the High Museum of Art in Atlanta. An accompanying catalogue, *The Architecture of Frank Gehry,* has been published by Rizzoli and the Walker Art Center (216 pages, $45). It contains a foreword by Henry Cobb and essays by Rosemarie Haag Bletter, Coosje van Bruggen, Mildred Friedman, Joseph Giovannini, Thomas S. Hines, and Pilar Viladas.

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along. The instant quality of Gehry's stature in the architectural pantheon was wryly acknowledged by the critic Martin Filler when he called him "America's most obscure great architect."[2]

There are many Frank Gehrys, not all of whom have been discovered by the star-making media. One is the adroit careerist who spent twenty years designing shopping centers for the Rouse Company. Another is the fastidious draftsman who was much in demand by developers like John Portman. Another is the Harvard-trained modernist fully capable of knocking off elegant exercises in the manner of his masters, such as his Miesian headquarters for Rouse in Columbia, Maryland. Then there is Gehry the artist/architect, the creator of innovative museum installations, of whimsical cardboard furniture, and of fish-shaped sculpture that has become a ubiquitous item in the homes of the art conscious. Yet another Gehry rehabs old industrial structures and builds new houses out of lumberyard materials, keeping the framing exposed to create a distinctive half-built look.

It is this last Gehry who is dearest to his recent fans, for reasons that have less to do with his achievements as a designer than with a shift in the sensibilities of the taste-making class. For the claims that are currently being made for Gehry—as the architect who will lead us out of the wilderness of postmodernism—cannot be justified on the evidence of his work. It is too idiosyncratic, its scale is too limited, and its effects are too dependent on shock value and the California setting for it to be applied on a wider scale.

What Gehry's popularity means as a measure of the cultural mood *is* of great interest, however. The Gehry vogue suggests that the era of the New Greed is reaching its end and that some form of bohemian-prole chic is on the way to replace it. Gehry's persona as a rough-hewn Californian and social outsider is crucial here. His charm is that he is *not* Philip Johnson or Robert A. M. Stern or even Michael Graves. These gentlemanly purveyors of upscale architecture have now been around long enough to begin boring their audience, which is ready to embrace Gehry as a refreshing newcomer. The irony is that by age and accomplishment Gehry belongs to an older generation of postmodernists which includes Charles Moore and Robert Venturi. But where Moore and Venturi turned to historical styles as an alternative to the modernist program, Gehry conducted his quarrel with modernism in more personal and formalist terms. Now that postmodernism is popularly identified with a sumptuous historicism such as Philip Johnson's, Gehry's stylistic divergence from the mainstream of the movement is even more apparent.

The California architect's social image enhances his appeal to postmodernism's detractors. At this moment, postmodernism has become synonymous not just with the revival of historical styles but with their revival as instruments of social climbing. It has become fashionable to assert social distinction by displaying a taste for the traditional, whether by means of a freshly designed historicist high-rise for one's office or period décor at home. We can observe the union of the new snobbery and traditional domestic imagery in the craze for Ralph Lauren, for example, who has festooned his Madison Avenue showrooms with born-again chintzes; or in the lust for English antiques on the part of the young investment bankers in Tom Wolfe's new novel, *The Bonfire of the Vanities.* (Wolfe's characters would seem to be acting out the rebellion against modernist austerity that he predicted in *From Bauhaus to Our House.*) The architectural equivalent exists in the nostalgic country houses of Robert Stern. With architecture enlisted as a weapon in the new class war, Gehry appeals to those who wish to side with the common man.

Gehry's suitability for the role of People's

2 See Kurt Anderson, "Building Beauty the Hard Way," *Time,* October 13, 1986, page 31; Paul Goldberger, "A Show That Gets Inside the Work of Frank Gehry," *The New York Times,* October 5, 1986, page 31; and Martin Filler, "Maverick Master," *House & Garden,* November 1986, page 211.

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Architect is owing partly to his own uneasy relation to the professional establishment. In 1972, Gehry turned his back on an opportunity to get rich from his cardboard furniture. When his Easy Edges tables and chairs caught the fancy of merchandisers like Bloomingdale's, Gehry withdrew them from the market, saying he feared for his identity as an architect. More recently, he was ostentatiously eliminated from consideration for the major museum commissions of the current Los Angeles art boom, at the Los Angeles County Museum and the Museum of Contemporary Art. But after the MOCA job was awarded to Arata Isozaki, Gehry had the satisfaction of seeing his consolation prize, the remodeling of a police garage for the museum's temporary quarters, become a smash hit with the public and the critics. Yet the fact that Gehry was originally rejected by the MOCA committee has kept his reputation as an underdog intact.

Then there is the matter of Gehry's personal style. Alongside colleagues like Robert Stern or Charles Jencks, whose Anglophiliac and sartorial pretensions communicate social values that verge on the royalist, how startling it is to behold Gehry, still in his Sixties-ish jeans and increasingly inclined to reminisce about his youth as a street kid in Toronto, where his father sold pinball machines for a living. Born Frank Goldberg in 1929, he changed his name in the Fifties, a step he now says he regrets. When questioned about influences on his work, Gehry harks back to his childhood. His fish lamps, he has said, are the latter-day incarnations of the carp his grandmother kept in her bathtub before making them into gefilte fish. When he was a boy, his grandfather's hardware store provided the material for the model towns he assembled on the living room floor. Now the hardware-store aesthetic is Gehry's trademark, earning him the title "poet of the ordinary."[3]

Gehry is best known for what critics call his "builder's" mode, and his signature work is the house he designed for his family ten years ago in the Los Angeles-area community of Santa Monica. Here Gehry "wrapped" a pink-shingled, two-story Dutch Colonial house in an outer wall of corrugated aluminum, topped by chain-link fencing and punctured by asymmetrical windows that reveal the studs and bracings of the interior. The resulting assemblage forces on the viewer an awareness of building process. Is the house still under construction, or about to be pulled down? The wood frame is at once emphasized, being exposed to the eye, and rendered incidental, since it is now just one layer of a multi-skinned support structure. The much-studied Gehry House is an elaborate expression of the same funky spirit that informs his beach houses and studios in nearby Venice. These plywood and aluminum assemblages have become tourist attractions, drawing pilgrimages of well-dressed art worshippers into the shabby streets of the racially mixed community, where low rents have spawned a culture of artists' studios, galleries, and restaurants. It was here that Gehry set up his own office in 1980, sharing space with the artist Chuck Arnoldi.

Added to the appeal his public finds in Gehry's maverick persona are the interpretive possibilities of the work itself. His architecture lends itself to description by a vast range of buzzwords. His "builder's" buildings have been celebrated under the labels of deconstructivism, regionalism, expressionism, formalism, high-tech, low-tech, "funk-punk," process art, and macho chic. In addition to these, Gehry's work lays a common-sense claim to the charms of hands-on carpentry in the age of computer design. It is in tune, too, with the spirit of the New Bohemia and its associations with the squalor, danger, and trendiness of Venice, where the ethos of SoHo is grafted onto the distinctive slumminess of the L.A. beach culture.

What Gehry says about his work is vague enough to allow all of his interpreters to believe they are right. Most often he says he

3 Benjamin Forgey, "Architecture on the Edge," in *The Washington Post,* May 2, 1987, p. G3.

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designs as he does because he prefers the way buildings look during construction. "They look like hell when they're finished," he has observed. "But when they are under construction they look great." His disarming remarks do express an important truth about present-day building: that there is an unsettling disjunction between the inside and the outside. With the expanded capacities of construction technology, the modernist principle of form following function is rendered arbitrary. An ever less necessary relation exists between the skin of a building and its structure and interior space. In our decade, the postmodern majority has taken this split as an opportunity to glorify surfaces. Their historicism is largely a matter of applied ornament, the sticking on of cornices, gables, porticoes, colonnades, and so on. This trend has been accompanied by the escalation of luxury in the skin itself, as polished stone replaces concrete, glass, and metal as the exterior material of choice in the urban high-rise. The typical postmodern building—Johnson's towers come to mind—is the decorated box, whose elaborate and costly surface encloses a standardized interior.

In the war between inside and out, Gehry is a partisan of the inside. Using the simple construction methods he favors, he has been able to create surprisingly rich and warm interiors, where the juxtapositions of unpainted beams and plywood surfaces glow with color and texture against wire mesh and metal siding and fixtures. These low-cost buildings aspire to the charm of honest carpentry, but they have more style than they would if the client had done the work himself. Perhaps Gehry's fondness for basic construction is related to his success in rehabbing industrial buildings like the Temporary Contemporary and the new Santa Monica Museum of Art, a 1908 dairy warehouse that will open as a museum this spring.

Gehry himself would never resort to such speculation. It would be out of keeping with his unpretentious persona. The least ideological of the current generation of influential architects, Gehry goes only so far as to claim an understanding of the culture of the Southern California suburban lower middle class. When called upon to defend his most controversial buildings, his justification is usually social. He claims his work is appropriate for Los Angeles communities such as Santa Monica. When he built his own house there in 1977, the unfriendly reaction of his neighbors constituted a crisis for Gehry, provoking him to the following flights of analysis.

"Everybody has their camper truck in front, everybody has their boat in back," Gehry said, describing his neighborhood in the documentary film *Beyond Utopia* (1983). "There's a lot of activity related to hardware and junk, and cars and boats and stuff. The neighbors have come around and said, 'I don't like your house,' and I say 'What about your boat in the backyard? What about your camper truck? It's the same material. It's the same aesthetic.' They say, 'Oh no, no, that's normal.'"

Here we see that, like his more ideologically inclined colleagues, Gehry is a champion of the American vernacular. Where Robert Venturi has said that "main street is almost all right," Gehry would go further to insist that main street is perfectly all right. The irony for Gehry is that main street is not about to return the favor. His most vociferous critics have come from the class where he wishes to claim his roots, while his supporters are intellectuals and artists. It was ever thus for the architect with a social conscience.

The case of Frank Gehry is but the latest example of one of the great failures of twentieth-century architecture: the inability to unite the populist intentions of architects with true popular taste. Gehry's sad struggle to be accepted by lower-middle-class suburbanites is no less doomed than the efforts at the other end of the social spectrum by Stern and Graves. Gehry may draw his imagery from the recreational vehicle in his neighbor's driveway, but he is never going to sell one of his aluminum-sided houses to that neighbor. Meanwhile Stern and Graves borrow architectural motifs from period

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furniture, but people who live with this sort of furniture are not likely to be in the market for a house by Stern or Graves.

So despite his image as the common man's architect, the social meaning of Gehry's work is fuzzy with contradiction. But there can be no quibbling about its regional quality. At a time when the great hope for the architectural future is most often said to be regionalism, Gehry can claim to be just that, a Los Angeles architect. His use of builder's materials is descended from the experimental Case Study Houses built for Los Angeles in the Thirties and Forties under the sponsorship of John Entenza's influential *Arts + Architecture* magazine. The purity of Gehry's Los Angeles identity, however, causes one to wonder how he will manage in Boston or New Haven. His renovation of the De Menil apartment on Central Park West in New York sets a worrisome precedent. Here he gutted a unique, circa-1910 studio, replacing it with a geometric space anonymous enough to be anywhere. A certain nervousness about what Gehry might next perpetrate in Manhattan is evident in jokes currently circulating about his planning to put one of his fish on top of Madison Square Garden.

The Gehry aesthetic is a creature of the hospitable climate and pluralistic culture of Southern California. The spirit of his most popular buildings is inseparable from their immediate settings. Much to the point is his much-touted Loyola Law School campus, set in a tough section of Los Angeles's old downtown. On a street where chain-link fences protect rows of dilapidated wooden houses and concrete commercial buildings, Gehry's stucco, plywood, and metal structures do have the virtue of fitting in. Yet their success as design is relative. The wonder is that anyone would even attempt to do architecture in such a neighborhood. The same is true in Venice, where one of the chief aims of Gehry's rough sheet-metal-and-plywood concoctions is to reflect their surroundings. A Gehry disciple, Frederick Fisher, has described the Venice streetscape as a "natural collage." In this setting, Gehry's combinations of materials and forms appear less self-consciously arty than they would anywhere else. Gehry has met the contextualist's standard of achieving harmony with the existing environment, but in the case of these L.A. locales, the standard is appallingly low.

One of Gehry's most popular buildings is the Norton House in Venice, a beachfront residence for a screenwriter who used to be a lifeguard. Gehry has created a tower that echoes the nearby lifeguard stands, and added colorful exterior panels in throwaway materials: fiberboard, fishnet, brick, bathroom tile. Typically, Gehry's work here is an addition to an existing cottage. To the layman, the Norton House, like much of Gehry's low-budget residences, would seem an imaginative remodeling job. But to today's architecture audience, with its appetite for process, collage, the vernacular, contextualism, biography, and so on, it means more. It is a form of art. In the way he has positioned himself vis-à-vis this audience, Gehry has transcended traditional definitions, managing to be perceived as an artist and as a master of the vernacular at the same time.

If there is any label more prestigious than regionalist these days, it is artist. Artist is a designation Gehry has made a point of rejecting, calling the term "dismissive" and saying, "I am an architect. I want to make architecture." Nevertheless, Gehry has invited the artist/architect label with his excursions into sculpture, and by his protracted involvement with the Los Angeles art scene. He has been a friend and sometime collaborator of such painters and sculptors as Chuck Arnoldi, Robert Irwin, Ed Ruscha, Billy Al Bengston, and Ron Davis. The fabled Gehry sensibility belongs to this generation of Southern California artists, with their anti-academic bravura and their fascination with industrial processes, gadgets, and the beach and car cultures.

Unlike architects who are taken up by the art crowd after they become famous, Gehry

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came of age among these artists. There was nothing contrived about his early collaborations with Ron Davis or with Billy Al Bengston, for whom he designed an installation for a show at the Los Angeles County Museum. Gehry's first offbeat buildings were studios for Gemini Graphic Editions and the graphic artist Lou Danziger, both located in the "gallery zone" near Melrose. It was perhaps inevitable that Gehry would design the main watering place for Venice's gallery scene, Rebecca's restaurant, which sits across the the street from the L.A. Louvre gallery.

In the burgeoning Los Angeles art world, Gehry occupies an earned place. Getting along with artists is no small accomplishment, and Gehry has excelled at it, to the envy of other architects and the armies of museum and foundation professionals trying to generate artist/architect collaborations now that they have become so chic. To them, Gehry has the mystique of a natural collaborator who has progressed effortlessly from helping his L.A. pals to working with international stars such as Richard Serra and Claes Oldenburg. (Oldenburg has created a pair of giant binoculars as the entry to Gehry's planned Los Angeles headquarters for the Chiat Day advertising agency.)

The one talent Gehry has demonstrated consistently is a sensitivity to the intentions of artists. His work with Ron Davis is a case in point. In 1972, he and Davis worked together on a house that would imitate the optical effects the painter was then exploring. It was Gehry's task to embody at full scale the wrenched planes of a Davis canvas. For the house, the painter asked Gehry to translate the planar formulas of his two-dimensional canvases into architectural space. The result is an architectural tour de force, as inspired and freakish as the baroque distortions of spaces in Sir John Soane's house in London. In a less thoroughgoing way, Gehry has employed distortion in his other residences, notably in his own house, with its twisted window frames and oddly angled views. By now distortion has become a Gehry trademark, expressing itself in projects as recent as the Winton Guest House in Wayzata, Minnesota. It is the effect he has pursued with a dogged persistence and perverse originality, drawing his ideas not from the theatrical illusion traditionally studied by architects but from painting and sculpture.

The happiest results of Gehry's involvement with art have been his museum installations. Here he has been able to show off his love of the unfinished in structures that are by definition temporary. The rightness of Gehry's Temporary Contemporary for the scale and mood of certain contemporary work was remarked upon by nearly every critic of MOCA's inaugural show.

An exception to his magic touch with exhibition spaces is his Aerospace Museum for Exhibition Park in downtown Los Angeles. The façade has been popular because of the presence of a real F-104 Starfighter among its many offbeat shapes. An obtruding geometric form thrusts out from the façade, suggesting the defiance of gravity. The entrance is hidden to the side while the plane hangs like a sign over a central window large enough to be a door. This teasing arrangement of the exterior is purely scenographic, however. It bears no effective relation to the interior, where the great cantilevered form encloses an echoing unused space instead of the telescope that its shape suggests. Meanwhile the exhibits of aviation history are crowded into the small ground floor. The overall effect is tackily improvisational, out of keeping with the museum's role as a permanent place of public education.

The drawbacks of the Aerospace Museum raise a crucial question for Gehry's future: whether his funk aesthetic can be translated into larger proportions, to satisfy an audience other than the art patrons who have heretofore commissioned houses, studios, and exhibition spaces from him. Gehry is now facing the challenge that the entire postmodern generation faces as it negotiates the transition from the small and private to the public and large. This is the test that daunted Graves at the Whitney Museum and

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Venturi at the National Gallery in London. Neither architect thoroughly satisfied his audience: Graves because he was so daring, Venturi because he was so conservative. The future is especially problematic for Gehry, since his style has been so self-consciously that of the outsider—provocative, subversive, drawing its strengths from limitations of budget and material. In Graves's most modest designs one perceives the stifled craving for more luxurious materials and generous proportions. In Gehry's work, by contrast, one senses no such ambitions. It is an architecture that has made a virtue of constraints. This is not to say that Gehry the trained modernist would have any trouble fulfilling a mainstream role. He has done so in his new buildings for the Computer Science/Engineering Facility at the University of California at Irvine. But this is not the Gehry the public has taken up as a hero. There is simply no evidence, from his most popular work, that Gehry can go beyond what he has already done. If he does, it will not look like the architecture of Frank Gehry.

Certain drastic limitations are inherent in Gehry's approach. These derive from his dubious—though highly fashionable—assumption that the ends of art and architecture are the same. If we consider Gehry as an artist, what sort of art is he making? It is an art that puts the expressive needs of its creator first. Gehry differs most radically from mainstream postmodernism in the way he has ignored architecture itself as a source of imagery, preferring the contents of his own psyche and the events of his own biography. Thus Gehry enjoys telling interviewers about the connection between the fish theme in his work and his grandmother's bathtub, as well as about his astrological identity as a Pisces. By the same logic, the exposed innards of his Santa Monica house have autobiographical (and therefore architectural) meaning since they reveal the construction history of *his* house. Whether such private meanings are always intelligible to others is a question. (In the case of his gun-toting Santa Monica neighbor, the answer would seem to be no.)

But the essential limitation to the Gehry mode is how dark its emotional content can be. A profound disquiet is the feeling summoned up by Gehry's most powerfully expressive work. In his designs for hillside houses such as the Smith House, there is an ominous mood inspired by the sense of colliding volumes and structures in precarious relation to their setting. (This is perhaps a symptom of the earthquake consciousness that is said to burden the souls of Los Angeles architects.) By suggesting volumes that struggle against the pull of gravity (as in the Aerospace Museum), the unreliability of depth perception (as in the Davis House), and the likelihood of imminent demolition or collapse (as in any of his "half-built" buildings), Gehry has become the poet of the temporary, not the ordinary.

It is these emotional ambitions that most set Gehry apart from mainstream postmodernism, whose ideologues attacked modernist architecture for its negative affect (the notorious alienation inspired by tower-in-the-park development, for example). His fellow postmodernists called for an architecture of confidence, engagement, playfulness. But Gehry answered that call with work that seems bent instead on expressing a new range of intensely negative emotions.

Along with James Wines, Gehry is our foremost creator of contemporary ruins. His buildings do achieve the poignancy of the genre, bringing on a recognition of loss, not of past glories, but of present hope—that is, the confidence to build to last. Gehry says that the disquieting effect of his unfinished or colliding buildings is intended, that they express his sense of life's uncertainty. "We're in a culture made up of fast food and advertising and throwaways," he has been quoted as saying. "So I think that these ideas about building are more expressive of our culture than something finished is." Among younger American and European architects, Gehry is not alone in his flirtation with cultural nihilism. Those who find solace in such assertions of uncertainty argue that, in our time in history, only fools and hypocrites attempt an architecture that reassures.

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Even given the familiar ring of Gehry's description of the trashy, temporary quality of real life, to insist that our buildings ought to express doubt and evanescence in order to be authentic puts a violent twist on our definitions of what architecture is. It has been the function of architecture to ward off anxiety by providing shelter, safety, comfort, and continuity. "When we build, let us think that we build forever," Ruskin said. From this point of view, the proposition that architecture should symbolize dissolution has the ring of a paradox from Metaphysical poetry. (It provokes that embarrassing question: Is it architecture?)

Gehry is the leader of the party of architects, a minority historically but on the rise today, who do have this provocative yet vastly less confident view of their purpose. Oddly, the strain of cultural despair in Gehry's work brings it in line with its stylistic opposite, the historicist tower. In its most ornamented granite-and-marble monumentality, postmodernism's high end has been criticized for its spiritual hollowness. Yet, spiritually, Gehry's "builder's" aesthetic expresses a similar mood of failed conviction. With the advent of Gehry, the American public now has its choice between a cynical luxury architecture, on the one hand, and the nihilistic junkiness of "deconstructivism" on the other. It is not an acceptable choice. Nor is it one that is even apparent to the public. Under the spell of the architect's persona, with its appealingly democratic associations, his fans do not realize what they are getting in Gehry—a nihilist under the jeans.

Rafael Ferrer

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Art

What's major? What's minor?

by Jed Perl

Park Avenue and Forty-seventh Street isn't one of the places where gallery-goers usually make a stop; but it was worth the detour in December and early January, when the Banco di Napoli had up a display of the eighteenth-century Neopolitan Crib figures, which are called *pastori.* More than fifty examples, each between a foot and two high, all with elegantly carved heads and hands and elaborate costumes, were gathered together into a scene of the kind that some aristocratic Neopolitan families created in their homes two hundred years ago. This Neopolitan Crib, called a *presepio,* is the product of a secular sensibility; and the Nativity and Angels and Three Kings play a fairly small role, enveloped as they are by a panorama of figures representing the local low life and tradespeople as well as the exotic types who were described in the travel literature of the time. According to a catalogue privately printed by the Banco di Napoli, no complete *presepio* has come down to our day. The bank's holdings of figures were brilliantly united by Marisa Piccoli Catello and Silvana Piccoli of Naples into a dramatic series of scenes ranged over a picturesque mountain landscape. This was a crowded little planet, all salmon, green, scarlet, and gold, naturalistic in detail, fantastical in effect.

In spite of its tantalizing mix of theater, sculpture, and décor, the *presepio* looked clear, lucid, logically consistent. And in the midst of a season that has already brought us the religious kitsch of Julian Schnabel, the dime-store baroque of Frank Stella, and the pop-up world of Red Grooms, anything that mixed media but remained coherent held a viewer's attention. Viewed diorama style, as they were at the Banco di Napoli, the groups of Crib figures were like paintings exploded into three dimensions; they formed the kinds of picturesque and ribald scenes one knows from the genre paintings of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The scenes of a kitchen, and of a group of people seated around a table, looked like Annibale Carracci and Louis Le Nain paintings come to life. Contemporary artists who paint groups of figures might want to sketch from a *presepio*; they could learn much about how gestures and dramatic juxtapositions build a narrative. As a tableau vivant the *presepio* also ties into the confusion many are feeling of late about the place of spatial illusion within painting. For those who agree or half agree with Gertrude Stein's dictum that "anything in a painting that imitates air is illustration and not art," the *presepio* presents a way out in some respects not unlike Frank Stella's way out. If an artist is unwilling to paint air, he can put painted figures into real air. But the difficulties of working in bastard forms, which confound many of our contemporary artists, don't really hold with the art of the *presepio.* The mixed-media idea is inherent in a Christmas doll-house scene designed for domestic consumption, and the social situation of the eighteenth century

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apparently had ways of accommodating both the sophisticated sculptors who did the heads and hands and the amateur enthusiasts among the aristocrats who worked on sewing costumes and painting scenery.

The Crib figures, with their beautifully carved and painted terra-cotta heads and wooden hands and flexible bodies, are conventional types; and yet the virtuoso execution and the lovely detailing of the costumes gives the best of them a theatrical presence that draws you in. These ruffians and country beauties, knife-sharpeners and shepherds are like courtiers at a masked ball acting their respective roles to the hilt. They twist their little fingers, screw up their tan and pink faces. The *pastori* are elegant; but the vigor of the street is a part of them as well. Among the finest figures are the Feasting Shepherd, with his bald cranium, mouthful of broken teeth, and enormous, comically ornamental ears; the Poor Shepherd, with his addled blue eyes and lank black hair; and a sleeping male figure that looks like a down-at-the-heels relative of Bernini's *Blessed Ludovica Albertoni*. The *presepio* even includes miniature vegetables, among them a bunch of delicately curling, amusingly rococo broccoli. Only the nativity figures are a bit of a bore.

Something like the *presepio*'s charm—the charm of a mature intelligence at play—is to be found in the work of Alexander Calder. Calder's *Circus,* on permanent display at the Whitney Museum of American Art, was a plaything of Twenties Paris, and a delight in miniaturization and bold fantasy is also at the heart of Calder's wire and wood sculpture of the Thirties, a selection of which was featured at the Whitney this winter. The work in "Alexander Calder: Sculpture of the Nineteen Thirties"[1] takes the visionary impracticalities of Miró's Surrealism and the pure idealism of Mondrian's Neoplasticism into sculptures that are like absurdist toys for adults. With their slender wire trajectories leading to and from planets carved of wood and sometimes painted in red and white, these sculptures look good surrounded by a lot of bare wall and clear light. Calder is experimenting with dimension and direction—shooting straight lines and arcs and circles into uncharted space, creating his own idiosyncratic three-dimensional astronomical models. The work is sly and delicate in its effects; it's brilliant bantamweight sculpture. Fifty years ago these constructions, some of which are set in motion by motors or by wind, must have looked startlingly modern; now they're more like skeletal mementos—the pressed-flower souvenirs of an American who was in Paris during one of the great moments of European art.

When I first heard that the Whitney was organizing this little show, it sounded like the kind of thing our museum of American art ought to be doing; but after seeing fourteen sculptures presented like historical curiosities on a low platform in the Whitney's main floor exhibition space, I wonder whether the Whitney can provide a friendly atmosphere for anything at all. Richard Marshall, who organized the Calder show and wrote the catalogue, is one of the group of curators responsible for the Whitney Biennials, and gathered together at the Whitney these Calders looked hard and cold, almost like something you'd see at a recent Biennial. In the catalogue of the show, Marshall reproduces a photograph of a Calder exhibition at the Galerie Percier in Paris in 1931. Clearly this vintage installation, in which the sculptures were lined up on a low shelf that circled the room, inspired the Whitney's wraparound platform. The improvisatory informality of that 1931 show cannot, of course, be regained. It would be an affectation to use white-painted wooden crates as bases for the work in a Calder show at the Whitney. But in trying to update the original setting the Whitney is

1 "Alexander Calder: Sculpture of the Nineteen Thirties" was on view at the Whitney Museum of American Art from November 14 through January 17. It was organized by Richard Marshall, associate curator of exhibitions, who also wrote a brochure with the same title (55 pages, $3.50).

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both too close to Thirties Paris and too far away. I know that the installation can't entirely be blamed on the curator, but it's a responsibility of the curator to preserve and even bring to the fore the texture of a work of art. What's missing at the Whitney Calder show is the delicate aura that ought to cling to the originals—their unique combination of folk-art fantasy and new-age idealism. Jammed together in 1931, the Calders may have looked like the component parts of a new universe. Jammed together now, they're turned from metaphors into designs. Metaphors need to be able to expand; at the Whitney the Calders have been depersonalized, flattened out.

And who, really, can be surprised, when so much of the Whitney's energy is spent glorifying contemporary art in which structure and sensibility count for nothing at all? How can a museum rise to the occasion of the Calder of the Thirties when upstairs it's presenting Julian Schnabel—an artist with no quality, no feeling—as one of the masters of our time? It may be possible to analyze a work by Julian Schnabel in terms of structure or sensibility (that's more or less what Thomas McEvilley does in his catalogue essay, "The Case of Julian Schnabel"), but nothing fundamental about how art is made or how it affects us can be deduced from the process. This is one way of saying what's wrong with Schnabel. Schnabel's admirers don't present him as an artist who worries about the same sorts of things that other artists worry about; he's presented as a unique figure—and I question whether even the greatest artist is really a unique figure. In comparing Calder's work to that of Arp or Miró or Mondrian, one can analyze in very specific ways the use of certain shapes, colors, and configurations. If Calder's whimsy doesn't have quite the weight of Arp's, one can grasp why that is. And if Arp's humor doesn't quite have the weight of Brancusi's, one can grasp why that might be, too. It's a mistake of the present to see the work of genius as the product of inexplicable artistic operations. Masterpieces may have mystery, but there are ways to describe

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the distance between the minor-minor and the major-minor and the minor-major and the major-major. It's not academic to ask an artist to be conscious of these distinctions. And it's inevitable that an institution like the Whitney, which exhibits stuff like Schnabel that can't even be called minor-minor and calls it major-major, should be blind to the refinements of taste and technique that give an artist's work its quality, and a Calder of the Thirties its particularity.

Though you might not know it from reading the art press, there is considerable unhappiness and dissatisfaction in the art community today. In the past few years a number of new galleries have opened downtown that, while not exactly dissenting from the status quo, do seem to want to shift attention back to a direct, unmediated experience of the work of art. I would include in this very loose category R. C. Erpf, Beitzel, Victoria Munroe, Stephen Rosenberg, and perhaps John Good. (I hesitate about Good only because this gallery is at times much preoccupied with concept- and theory-oriented work.) I've been most interested in what these galleries are showing, and have made an effort to see as many of their shows as I can; yet as they have passed their one- and two- and three-season marks, they've remained something of a conundrum. No one could accuse this group of galleries of bad taste, and they do show some artists who are interested in taking familiar genres in new directions; but the basic stance often has too much the air of moderation for moderation's sake, rather than moderation for art's sake. The abstractions and landscapes one encounters in these galleries don't offend; but in a period of aggressively offensive art the work may teach us that inoffensiveness isn't the answer, either. I was interested to see Christopher Lucas's show at John Good in December. Lucas's new paintings, in which Russian Constructivist-looking signs are inscribed on sheets of molded plywood, are engaging. And I was interested to see Willy Heeks's show of works on paper at Beitzel in January. These energetic, centralized images are reminiscent of the paintings that the artist Wols did in Paris in the late Forties. I can understand how this work appeals to people who say, "I want to buy a work of art, not a media event." Lucas has ideas aplenty; still, he never carries his ideas very far; he doesn't know how to go from a beginning to . . . something else. Heeks has a sensibility which remains underdeveloped. In 1950 the sort of painterly effects that Heeks favors represented the endpoint of a long line of development in abstract art. Artists were declaring, "This is where we are today." Willy Heeks paints like someone who's arrived; but it's the journey that really matters.

I continue to be hopeful about these new galleries; I also believe they have to be extremely careful of their relation to the politics of style. What we need are galleries that don't look at works of art as end products—even if the end product looks like a good idea. Each painting or sculpture must be judged as the partial record of a process that involves taste, intelligence, sensibility. The artists exist, they're out there working. But I have a hunch that even the most open-minded gallery owners are put off by a lot of the best work that's being produced today. The work looks naked, even simplistic. Accepting an art that's actually constructed is very difficult now. Major-major is the pose at Mary Boone; but major-minor can be an art gallery pose, too.

"The Push and Pull of Cubism," the latest in the series of Hans Hofmann exhibitions that the André Emmerich Gallery has culled from the artist's estate, is all about painting as a process, as a series of steps. (A problem with some of the paintings is that Hofmann hasn't taken enough steps.) The nine compositions, all painted between 1949 and 1951, and mostly small by contemporary standards (four or five feet), are clear, cheerful, unprepossessing. There are ruled lines, rectangular and triangular forms, and bright, straight-from-the-tube color. These Hofmanns have neither the moody exuberance of the Forties works nor the effulgence of the big

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canvases of the later Fifties and Sixties. Hofmann fills the rectangle, extends trajectories from edge to edge, but the intimations of still life and interior space don't ever quite take hold. The real subject here may be guilelessness. In this series of works he's knocking out solid, slightly perfunctory compositions. The show gave us a look at the pedagogical Hofmann: the professor with the heavy German accent who believed in mastering the basics.

You have to believe in the basics to be a great teacher—and Hofmann was the greatest teacher of painting in America from the Thirties through the Fifties. He began to teach Cubism in New York at a time when it was known only in the most watered-down versions; he also taught artists how to trust their own intuition, how to improvise. For Hofmann the essential models were the Matisses and Picassos that he'd first seen in Paris when he was a young man; his immense value as a teacher rested in the way he could demystify those models. Coming into one of Hans Hofmann's classes, a student learned to set goals, pursue objectives, develop. For generations of American artists, Hofmann put Matisse and Picasso within the realm of the possible. He gave artists a way to approach the masterpieces, and it's amazing how many of his students rose to the occasion. Even many of the Hofmann students who "nobody ever heard of" did remarkable things.

Emmerich's "Push and Pull" show was a small essay in demystification. What you saw was what you got; the paintings left me feeling clear in the head. These Hofmanns aren't major art; but they're the product of a sensibility that knows what major is. As a painter who gained his first fame as a teacher, Hofmann knew what it meant to watch and wait. Perhaps he wasn't afraid of appearing minor; certainly he did a great deal of frankly experimental work. In Clement Greenberg's little monograph on Hofmann, published in 1961 when the artist was past eighty, there are allusions to matters other than the aesthetic. "Hofmann," Greenberg writes, "offers a lesson in patience. That lesson, from him and from others, I shall never finish learning. It includes one's own mistakes. One is also reminded of how in art the tortoise so often overtakes the hare." The Hofmanns from the years around 1950 that were at Emmerich in January are tortoise paintings. They define a procedure. When in the later Fifties and early Sixties Hofmann began to do work that struck many of his contemporaries as truly major, it was a vindication of the step-by-step idea.

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Dance

Showdance

by Eva Resnikova

Danny Buraczeski calls his company "Jazzdance," the verbal conflation evidently intended to distinguish it from the generic "jazz dance," a catchall used to refer loosely to show dancing. As anyone who has seen *A Chorus Line* knows, Broadway gypsies today are expected to know ballet and tap as well as traditional jazz. Buraczeski, himself a former show dancer, has transposed this hybrid form from its commercial context to the concert-dance stage and used it to choreograph composed jazz music for himself and his eight-member troupe.

On the evidence of his last New York program (January 19-24 at the Joyce Theatre), Buraczeski takes a balletic approach to jazz, eschewing tap and indulging only rarely in shoulder and pelvic isolations. His bulky physique is also a limiting factor of his movement vocabulary. Many of his dancers, too, have less than ideal bodies, and the general level of training is low. Moreover, though they have the advantage of youth, they lack the theatrical presence of the more seasoned Buraczeski: as the protagonist in *Night Vision,* his entrances produced a heightened effect that was palpable.

Set to tango music by the popular Argentine composer Astor Piazzolla, *Night Vision* is a quasi-narrative work. A program note consists of a quote attributed to an Argentine general—"In any war there are people who disappear"—and the action showed the eventual triumph of the people, represented by three couples, over political oppression, in the form of a menacing Buraczeski in a generic khaki uniform. How this triumph is effected is never shown; at the end, one of the women appears simply to stare him down. (The press release speaks of "the power of imagination and desire over political control.") *Night Vision* comes off as naïve rather than pretentious: Buraczeski's simple, forthright style seems inherently unsuited to bear the burden of a political message.

Out of the Blues is a group dance to a bluesy yet upbeat commissioned score by Amy Duncan, performed live by her ten-member brass ensemble. The dim lighting and the musicians lined up against the back wall of the stage helped to create the atmosphere of an after-hours club. In their knee-length pleated skirts, anklets, and flat shoes, the girls had a vaguely 1940s look, and some of the steps recalled jitterbugging. But the dancers never really let themselves swing: they seemed stiff and self-conscious, as if aware of the mission of artistic responsibility with which they were charged.

Pithecanthropus Erectus, another group dance, is performed to a recording of Charles Mingus's tone poem of that name. It begins with a striking image that refers to the title (our ancestor just preceding Neanderthal man). The dancers, in silhouette, begin to enter single file in a crouched position. With each step, the first dancer unbends a little more, to assume an awkward straight-legged, flat-footed posture, each dancer after him following a beat behind.

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The final tableau shows the entire process, from the formless mass at the left to the fully erect Homo sapiens, like a display in the Museum of Natural History: a couple of hundred thousand years of evolution wittily boiled down to a handful of gestures and a few bars of halting music. At the end, one of the boys rudely pushes away another and assumes his place with a triumphant pose on half-pointe. In its invention and gentle humor, *Pithecanthropus* was easily the most successful choreography of the evening.

The program ended with the too cutely titled *Soulo,* a solo dance performed by Buraczeski to spirituals arranged for French horn and played onstage by Willie Ruff. Susan Weil provided a painted backdrop of a starry night sky that, with its Miró-like birds in flight and falling leaves, evokes the movement, variety, and mystery of nature. (A pity that the busy lighting scheme makes no sense visually or intellectually.) Music, décor, and movement coalesce to create a mood of both intimacy and grandeur. But there is too little variety in the meandering choreography, much of which appears to be aimless improvisation. Buraczeski's goal of adapting show dance to the concert stage is an admirable one, but he will have to transcend his own technical and physical limitations if he hopes to convince us of its expressive possibilities.

Mrs. Andrew Lloyd Webber is not the only leading lady this season who is required both to sing operetta-style and to dance on pointe. In the New Amsterdam Theatre Company's semi-staged revival of Jerome Kern's 1920 smash hit *Sally* (January 20-24 at the Academy Theatre), the eponymous heroine—a dishwasher with a talent for splits and kicks—is called upon to impersonate the world-renowned Russian ballerina Nockerova and to dance the lead in a "Butterfly Ballet" with the Ziegfeld Follies. This eleven-o'clock number is the comic high point, and Sally's one-liner as she prepares to go on stage ("You know I'm in over my head —you can't learn ballet in one week") elicits the biggest laugh of the evening.

Which gives you an idea of just how awful Guy Bolton's book really is. The original *Sally* was apparently immeasurably enhanced by the presence in the title role of the young Marilyn Miller, whom it made a star, and the opulent production of Ziegfeld, which reached its apogee in the ballet—not surprising, since it was also intended as a plug for his Follies. According to Gerald Bordman in *American Musical Theatre,* the décor by Joseph Urban was restrained in this number only by "his good taste." (Urban is finally getting some of the attention he merits as the subject of an exhibition at the Cooper-Hewitt Museum.)

Having neither stars nor décor, James Brennan, the director and choreographer of the New Amsterdam's revival, has made a virtue of necessity and turned what is here called "The Nockerova Ballet," to interpolated music by Victor Herbert, into a comic romp, with the emphasis on ineptness and tackiness. The corps de ballet girls are dressed in ill-fitting poison-pink tutus, the boys in ersatz-Russian white blouses and cummerbunds that recall Fred Astaire's Peter P. Peters masquerading as Petrov in *Shall We Dance.* A bemused Sally makes her entrance held aloft in a split by six boys—and remains there a very long while, as the other girls flutter about below her. When she's finally lowered on pointe in a bent-kneed fifth position, you can see that she's trying bravely not to cry out in pain.

There follows a series of lifts, and each time Sally is lowered the corps girls "place" her: turning out an extended leg, raising a drooping knee, giving her a push to spin her around in an unforeseen pirouette. In a group dance she is forced by the others to a position in the back row and then proceeds to get tangled up, knocked down, and trampled on. A quotation from the second act of *Giselle* confirms our suspicion that these fierce corps de ballet dancers are cousins to the man-eating Wilis.

When one of the girls turns out to be a real toe dancer and taunts Sally with a display of pointe work, our heroine rises to the occasion and even manages to pull off a

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manège of piqué turns, then challenges the upstart by performing tap in her toe shoes. (Tap-versus-ballet was a theme not only of the 1937 *Shall We Dance* but of the hit of the 1936 Broadway season, *On Your Toes,* with choreography by George Balanchine.) Having acquitted herself on the stage, Sally is immediately rewarded with a marriage proposal from the wealthy and handsome Blair Farquar. In their clinch, she rises on pointe —a nice detail that in a stroke neatly pulls together all the story strands.

The role of Blair calls for someone who can sing and act and tap dance, that of Sally for someone who can do all of this and toe dance as well. Christina Saffran is an appealing performer who is a competent dancer and a more than competent singer. (In Marilyn Miller these qualities were reversed.) Don Correia, who played the lead in the 1985 *Singin' in the Rain,* is attractive and can tap dance and sing but often appeared diffident, sometimes to the point of inaudibility. The producers had evidently made the decision, admirable in principle, to resort to amplification as little as possible. While it was a pleasure to listen to the all-acoustic orchestra (led with brio by Jack Lee), today's singing actors are accustomed to performing in a naturalistic style that is based upon the premise of electronic boosting. Body mikes are a must if the New Amsterdamers are not willing to tackle pre-electronic performance style and sing their intimate love duets cheek-to-cheek facing the audience.

With a top of fourteen dollars, Ice Capades (January 20-31 at Madison Square Garden) has got to be the biggest entertainment value in town. It is also a class act, with production values of Broadway caliber. If, as certain pundits are decrying, it's spectacle audiences crave nowadays, Ice Capades has it in spades: costumes dripping with glitter and feathers, dramatic lighting (in a chess ballet a black-and-white checkerboard is created on the ice), pyrotechnics, flying effects. It even has Art, in the form of the reigning Olympic ice-dancing gold medalists Jayne Torvill and Christopher Dean. And it has highly skilled professional skaters, not the amateurs pressed into service in *Starlight Express.* It also has better music than that other skating spectacular, including two bits of Sondheim: "Beautiful Girls" from *Follies,* used to open "A Glorious Ziegfeld Dream," and the waltz from *A Little Night Music,* which seems made for the heady, nonstop swirling of Torvill and Dean.

On the downside, Ice Capades must necessarily appeal to a wide audience, which accounts for the inclusion of a "Smurf" number, a Smurf being both a fuzzy creature and a trademark. The story was incomprehensible to this reviewer but seemed basically to involve a battle between good and evil. (Good triumphs.) Much of the staging was derivative, including the obviously Living Theatre-inspired breakdown of the fourth wall (technically, in the case of Madison Square Garden, the second and third walls as well). Unlike members of the Living Theatre, however, Ice Capade Smurfs wisely avoid interacting with anyone sitting in the press section.

Torvill and Dean perform their own choreography in four numbers scattered throughout the evening. Though they include some low lifts that are not permitted in Olympic ice-dancing competition, they do not attempt to dazzle with acrobatics, relying rather on their impeccable line, instinctive musicality, and romantic intensity. If only they would reconsider their attitude toward music—a problem endemic to the entire skating profession, which seems able to deal with music only in snatches measured in multiples of ten seconds.

The finale of Ice Capades's "Salute to Hollywood" has, among other things, girls with billowing glow-in-the-dark butterfly wings being flown on wires, gushing sparklers, and a skyful of soap bubbles, all to the strains of "That's Entertainment." And it was.

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Books

The men of 1914

by James Atlas

That artists are neglected by their contemporaries is a tenacious literary myth. The modernist scenario virtually requires them to linger on the margins of society until the moment—usually posthumous—when the public belatedly discovers their genius, vindicating the dark years of oblivion. De Quincey hiding from the bailiffs, Shelley banished from the land: they appeal to us now in the precise degree that they were estranged from the society of their own day. Obscurity validates their art.

But how representative of literary history is this myth? The neo-classical poets of the eighteenth century were very much men of their time, as were the Metaphysical poets before them; Donne's Sermons, Raleigh's sonnets, Pope's Satires achieved wide circulation in their own day. Poets were politicians, diplomats, public figures. The nineteenth-century novelists had a huge audience. Dickens, Tennyson, George Eliot were celebrities. There was nothing esoteric about literature in the Victorian age; novels were a popular form of entertainment.

It wasn't until the modernist era that literature found itself so persistently bewildering to its audience. One of the most striking things about *Makers of the New,* Julian Symons's history of modernism, is how unrecognized its practitioners were at the beginning of their working lives.[1] In retrospect, "the men of 1914"—as Wyndham Lewis referred to Eliot, Joyce, Pound, and, by implication, himself—stand as the central figures of the age. Academic commentators in particular have dwelled on the modernists as innovators, literary revolutionaries who fashioned a new English literature in their own image. This version of things is now canonical. Hugh Kenner's *The Pound Era,* brilliant, grandiose, erratic, is the main guide, but the shelf is long, and growing longer. Biographies of Pound appear on a nearly annual basis, and scholars have attacked Joyce's corpus, writes Symons, "with the assiduity of dung-beetles."

Symons gives a very good account of just how hard-won the struggle on behalf of modernism really was. *Blast,* where Lewis made his name, was a marginal publication, always low on funds; the circulation of Eliot's *Criterion* never exceeded a thousand; the "sales peak" of Harriet Weaver's *Egoist* was closer to four hundred. The great, now-classic works of the period, *The Waste Land, Ulysses, The Cantos,* were brought out by obscure imprints, in minuscule editions. No matter how often one has read the story of Joyce's travails over his masterpiece—the rebellion of typists, the refusal of printers to set *Ulysses* in type—it's still poignant. His faith in his own genius never wavered. (That spiritedness, it occurs to me, is an essential component of genius. It's not enough to discover one's own voice; one has to abide by it.)

1 *Makers of the New: The Revolution in Literature 1912-1939,* by Julian Symons; Random House, 295 pages, $19.95.

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What was it about these books that made the public so nervous? D. H. Lawrence's *The Rainbow* was banned in England; *The Waste Land* was derided in the press. From the vantage of the early Twenties, things looked grim indeed. "With the *Egoist* finished, Vorticism over, Pound self-exiled from London, Lewis almost silent, Eliot faintly praised, *Ulysses* effectively banned from publication, it must have been tempting to think in 1921 that what its enemies regarded as the lunacies of modernism were over."

The rejection of the modernists is even more curious when we consider the diversity of the styles incorporated under its name. What, precisely, did the men of 1914 have in common? Symons makes a brave, and largely plausible, effort to sum the matter up. When the modernists appeared on the scene, "the House of Letters in Britain was shaky," he remarks, "ready for destruction." Eddie Marsh's key anthology of 1912, *Georgian Poetry,* was stultifyingly conventional; Walter de la Mare, John Masefield, and Yeats's friend T. Sturge Moore were his main exhibits. The novel was dominated by Conrad, Arnold Bennett, and H. G. Wells—a more imposing constituency than the poets, to be sure, but more of the nineteenth century than of the twentieth. What the modernists demanded was a renovation of language—"a revolution of the word," in the now-quaint phrase of Eugene Jolas, who published chapters of *Finnegans Wake* in his magazine *transition* when the novel was still known as *Work in Progress.* The work of Joyce and his singular contemporaries was a rebellion, Symons claims, "against an art quite unlinked to modern life."

Julian Symons is that rare thing—a handful still survive in England—a man of letters. A well-known mystery writer and authority on the genre, an occasional novelist, a biographer of Carlyle, Symons is highly versatile; his best book, to my mind, is a touching, idiosyncratic memoir/biography of his brother, A. J. A. Symons, the author of that classic of literary detection, *The Quest for Corvo.* His writing is never pedantic. Aware of but unintimidated by previous scholarship, he brings to his task an amateur's breezy informality. He has the educated insouciance you find in Julian Barnes, in Humphrey Carpenter, in Peter Conrad—the assumption that journalists can write about literature in a serious way.

In *Makers of the New,* Symons addresses the modernists not as cultural icons but as men speaking (however unintelligibly at times) to men. His synopsis of the lives and works of the men of 1914 goes over familiar territory, but he's clearly done his homework; whenever my eye was about to glaze over from reading still another account of Wyndham Lewis's amorous doings or of that time in Paris when Eliot gave Joyce a parcel from Pound that contained a pair of old boots, I'd come across some anecdote I *didn't* know: it was news to me that H. D. used to urinate on Havelock Ellis. Only why, since Symons went to the trouble of consulting the originals of letters in the British Library, at Cornell, and in the Berg Collection of the New York Public Library, did he quote from these sources so sparingly? And why did he paraphrase when he could quote? Eliot, notes Symons, "was inclined to deprecate *The Waste Land* as a work that was simply an expression of personal unhappiness." But everyone knows Eliot's famous description of the poem as "a personal and wholly insignificant grouse against life." Surely the phrase is in the public domain.

At times, Symons himself seems bored by the chore of going over territory that's been so thoroughly traversed. "Lewis had been much occupied before the war and in its first years with love affairs," he writes in a desultory way. Or, two thirds of the way through his narrative: "Perhaps it should be repeated that the concern of this book is with the relationship of these writers to modernism, rather than their importance as novelists." There are frequent grammatical lapses: "With this in mind, and with encouragement from some of Chicago's literati, the *Little Review* appeared." And to say that some of his transitions are forced is putting it mildly. When William Carlos Williams visited Margaret

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Anderson and Jane Heap, the lesbian editors of the *Little Review,* in New York, Symons reports, he was "impressed by their great bed hung by four chains from the ceiling, but regretted the frequency with which the magazine looked toward Europe." This isn't informality; it's laziness.

Symons's irreverence verges on rudeness: he chastises a commentator on the work of George Oppen for writing "gobbledygook," and isn't afraid to complain about Gertrude Stein's "infantile simplicity" or Williams's "flowery absurdity." e.e. cummings he dismisses as "the Ogden Nash of modernism." But he's never far off the mark, and I found his harsh appraisal of Pound highly persuasive. Unlike so many critics, he comes right out and says that Pound was a publicist, a fop, a bore; and I'm grateful to him for openly addressing the matter of Pound's anti-Semitism. He quotes from a poem in *Blast* that urged readers to "SPIT upon those who fawn on the JEWS for their money," and doesn't hide his impatience with Pound's pushing efforts—his "random energetic goodwill"—on behalf of those whom he saw as candidates for modernist canonization. For Symons, a letter from the poet F. S. Flint ("you are indeed a disagreeable person, as you say, it is one of the regrets of all those who have ever known you") about sums it up. What comes through more vividly in this account than in any other I've read is Pound's megalomania—and its consequences for his career. By the late 1920s, Symons contends, the Pound era was drawing to a close. Having moved his base from London to Paris, he found himself out in the cold: "Visitors came to the flat in Notre Dame des Champs, admired or were amused by the home-made furniture, the tea-table made from packing cases painted scarlet, the armchairs constructed out of rough boards and canvas, but few accepted him in the role of dominating teacher. Most of the visitors left to worship at the shrines of Joyce and Stein."

Still, unattractive as he was, Pound figured importantly on the scene. His editing of *The Waste Land* transformed what might otherwise have been regarded as an exercise in bathos into a masterpiece; he devised schemes to raise money for Joyce and Eliot, promoted Lewis, haggled endlessly with the art collector and literary patron John Quinn. His genius was more entrepreneurial than literary.

Pound wasn't the only able publicist among the men of 1914. Self-promotion was a talent they shared. By the end of their careers, they enjoyed vast cultural prestige. But are they read now? *The Cantos* survive as a literary curiosity, and Pound's whole busy enterprise has a doomed feel about it. As for Wyndham Lewis, his books are erratically in print, but my sense is that his legend—the bohemian ambiance in which he moved, his notoriety as a seducer, the celebrated friendships with Eliot and Pound—is more generally known than his work. His self-conscious literary style seems oddly dated. For Lewis, prose was a pliant medium, perhaps too pliant; he wrote the way he painted, in a language at once abstract and figurative. His novels weren't plotless; plot was simply one element in the composition. He could be annoyingly didactic. His satire of Bloomsbury in *The Apes of God* is shrill and overdrawn; Symons himself disparages the characters as "fakes." But he could also tell a story when he set his mind to it; *The Revenge for Love,* about English radicals dabbling in revolution (a prefiguration of the Spanish Civil War), has a polemical energy that's rare in fiction now. Lewis is a writer who ought to be read.

For Symons, Eliot stands out as the dominant figure in the modernist pantheon—the man of 1914 who counts. It was Eliot whom the English poets of the Thirties chose to emulate—in particular Auden, whose demotic, conversational voice, Symons argues, was "wholly Eliotic." Eliot's reputation is high right now; witness the recent biographies by Peter Ackroyd and Ronald Bush. But the reluctance of Eliot's estate to permit substantial quotation has made accounts of him bland; and Symons's is no exception. A biography that doesn't afford us glimpses of

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the subject's written style feels monotonous, incomplete. The definitive biography of Eliot remains to be written. Until it is, we can't possess him the way Richard Ellmann gave us possession of Joyce—put him before us as an ordinary man of genius.

But even if Eliot were before us, to whom would he speak? The Royalist, High Church values he espoused are more than archaic; they're incomprehensible to a generation brought up to detest authority. And how can we pay homage to the tradition that Eliot claimed was essential to the development of literary sensibility when we have no idea what it is? For all I know, aspiring poets still read him—still have the memorable experience of discovering that neurotic, vibrant, high-strung voice on their own. But the critical style Eliot developed, the somber meditative discourse that found its way into the New Criticism of John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, and their disciples Randall Jarrell, John Berryman, and Robert Lowell, that nurtured R. P. Blackmur and produced a whole school of inspired commentary on what constitutes a poem, has gone the way of Yiddish; it's a dead language.

Still, it's easy to lament the loss of our exalted literary past and harder to appreciate it. What did the modernist revolution finally accomplish? A great deal, in Symons's view. It ushered in a new democratic language, enlarged the whole idea of what literature could be; it reverberated in American poetry from Hart Crane to Wallace Stevens, and in the work of Pound's disciples, from Charles Olson's Black Mountain coterie to the Objectivists, Louis Zukofsky, George Oppen, et al. But it was in many ways a theoretical influence. Literary modernism was more an idea than a movement, and as such it had no heirs. The modernists were sui generis; their originality thwarted emulation.

The revolution of the word was a purely literary phenomenon; in no way did it imply a political revolution. "Classical, reactionary and revolutionary: neither Eliot nor Lewis saw any contradiction in a technically revolutionary art opposed to revolutionary change in society." In other words, it was a revolution promoted by an elite, for the consumption of an elite. It presupposed a cultural sophistication that barred the masses from enjoying it. Even now, decades after their absorption into the culture, the works of Joyce, Eliot, Pound, and Lewis could hardly be said to have achieved a general currency. The academy is still the main guarantor of their high literary status; and they of its. The professors come before us as secular priests, initiating the lay public into the mysteries of the modernist Word.

The men of 1914 began in obscurity and ended up part of the curriculum. But even among intellectuals, modernism is out of fashion. Since the Sixties, Symons argues, popular culture has been in the ascendancy, "with highbrows falling over one another to acclaim the genius of the Beatles or elevate John Le Carré and Dick Francis to the status of master novelists." A critic of the old school, Symons makes large—and to my mind persuasive—claims for the primary modernist works. *Ulysses,* Lewis's *Tarr,* Pound's "Mauberley," *The Waste Land*: they endure as the standard by which subsequent literary generations must be measured. But the High Culture in which they flourished is history.

The critic as hero

Imre Salusinszky Criticism in Society. Methuen, 244 pages, $19.95

reviewed by Bradley W. Bloch

As we all know, criticism has undergone a crucial transformation since the advent of structuralism, semiotics, deconstruction, and post-structuralism. Oddly, although these methodologies might have been expected to reduce criticism to a purely impersonal, even scientific, exercise, they have had the opposite effect of turning a generation of critics into cult figures. The reason is not hard to find. If, as Harold Bloom proudly claims, literary criticism today "has the same status as lyric poetry or narrative writing," then the

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critic has the same status as the poet or novelist—at least in the eyes of other critics. For the generation that has followed Bloom's, such thinking has given rise to a new creature: the critic as hero.

The extent to which this view has taken hold is illustrated by *Criticism in Society,* a book of interviews with literary critics conducted by Imre Salusinszky, a tutor in English at the University of Melbourne. His subjects include many of the stars of the literary-critical firmament: Jacques Derrida, Northrop Frye, Harold Bloom, Geoffrey Hartman, Frank Kermode, Edward Said, Barbara Johnson, Frank Lentricchia, and J. Hillis Miller. Although there is much that is interesting—and horrifying—in the comments of the nine critics interviewed, the true cautionary tale of *Criticism in Society* is to be found in the questions posed, and not posed, by Salusinszky. For it is the outlook of Salusinszky and his peers, now making their way out of graduate school and onto university faculties, that will set the tone for literary discussion in the years to come.

In an earlier day, the critic felt it was his responsibility to illuminate the work, and sometimes the life, of the artist, not of himself. Edmund Wilson, among other things a critic with far more lasting significance than most of those now practicing the craft, had a pre-printed postcard declining requests for interviews. Times have clearly changed; now that the critic occupies center stage, the life the critic studies most closely is his own. Salusinszky came of age in this environment, and in his interviews no personal detail is too inconsequential to be discussed. Frank Lentricchia, a critical theorist at Duke University, goes on for pages about how his grandparents' lives in Southern Italy affect the way he reads literature, while Harold Bloom relates how a mid-life crisis, followed by five years of intermittent analysis, may or may not have helped lay the foundation for *The Anxiety of Influence.* Barbara Johnson illustrates the relation between Bloom and Paul de Man by telling a story about Bloom's guess that her dog's name was "Nietzsche."

This is not to say that meaningful topics do not crop up in these interviews. When J. Hillis Miller questions what effect teaching literature to Yale undergraduates has on society at large, when Harold Bloom rejects the notion that literature ultimately changes the reader, when Northrop Frye rails against the modern university as a place of "labyrinthine arguments," one looks for Salusinszky to direct the conversation down these paths. These are, after all, important questions. But substantive discussion does not get far before he returns to the inconsequential, asking his subject to compare himself to another critic, or to speculate on the connections between Ronald Reagan and Emersonian individualism. When Barbara Johnson, positing a "deconstruction of everyday life," says that the marketing of soft drinks for dieters "certainly seems related to the functioning of blanks, let's say, in a Mallarmé text," the hope is for Salusinszky to press this far from obvious point, particularly as it comes from a professor of French and Comparative Literature at Harvard. Instead, Salusinszky asks: "Do you find yourself using very much of what you've learned from Derrida and de Man as you move through the extra-university world?" Jacques Derrida, discussing wider uses of deconstruction in the university, says, "You have to train people to become doctors or engineers or professors, and at the same time to train them in questioning all that—not only in a critical way, but I would say in a deconstructive way." What is the "that" which is to be questioned, one wants to know, but Salusinszky, like many contemporary critics, does not let poorly defined terms stand in the way of sweeping analysis.

Despite the book's title, Salusinszky is far less interested in criticism or society (let alone literature) than in tracing the tangled web of influence which connects the critics he interviews. At the beginning of his talk with Frank Kermode, for example, he offers this bit of analysis:

> If I can develop, for a moment, my own fiction—which is that there is some sequence, or

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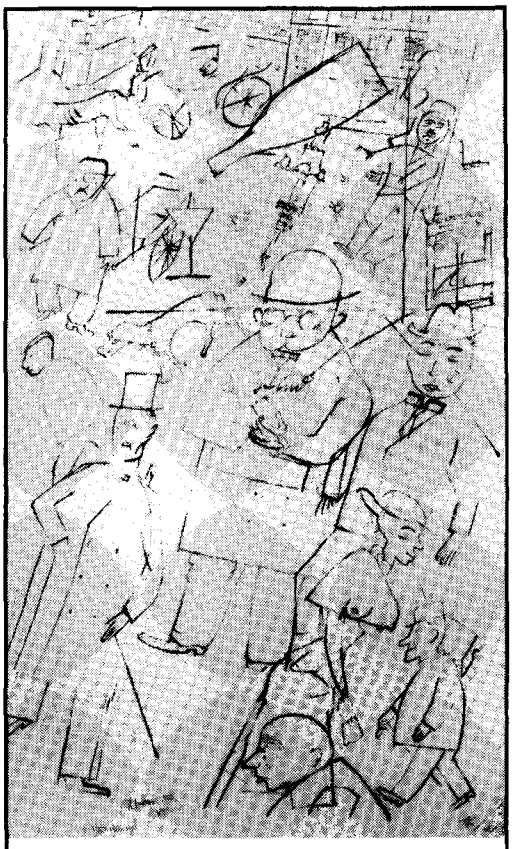
> relation, or pattern among the critics that I've chosen to interview—let me see if I can begin to fold you into the mix. With Bloom and Hartman, I found that we began by talking a great deal about Northrop Frye. That makes a lot of sense because, in the first place, I completely agree with what Bloom said: that Frye is the major figure in the literary criticism of our century. In the second place, both Bloom and, to a lesser extent, Hartman have had important intellectual struggles with Frye . . . .

This may very well be the case, but it is frightening to contemplate that such information now constitutes a valuable insight. Later in the interview he refers to T. S. Eliot as "the Jacques Derrida of his time," to which Kermode replies: "I suppose so, though that's a rather odd way of putting it." One suspects—or at least hopes—that it was a sense of politeness which kept Kermode from commenting on the absurdity of the comparison.

Salusinszky speaks in the mature vocabulary of criticism's new age, where questions are strewn with adjectives like "Fryean/Romantic," "Bloomian," "Kermodian," and interviews are "a set of critical functions, in the sense of 'social or festive meetings conducted with ceremony.'" In his interview with Bloom, Salusinszky points out "one surely kabbalistic fact," that Derrida and Bloom were born within four days of each other. He then asks if there is "anything of the kabbalist about Derrida," so absorbed in Bloom's jargon that he does not ponder to what extent "kabbalist" can be a truly meaningful description of a twentieth-century secular French philosopher. With a similar lack of critical judgment, he asks a short while later, "Can we imagine such a thing as a gnostic university? Can we imagine gnosticism *without* the university?" Although "gnosticism" properly refers to a complex group of religious movements in the Greco-Roman world, the critical world has no qualms about applying the term to the modern university, the experience of reading, or even *Macbeth*: for Bloom, the play makes sense "only as a kind of gnostic universe."



George Grosz, *Blinde auf der Strasse*, 1916

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The vicious circle of critical self-reference which pervades *Criticism in Society* was encouraged by the strategy of allowing the subject of each interview to read the transcripts of the earlier interviews in the series, so that each critic might be "invited to insert his or her own voice into dialogue with [the others]." The purpose of this, stated on the book's jacket, is to reveal "criticism with a human face."

In light of the result, one must ask if it might be better for criticism to be a bit more anonymous. Such a remedy seems unlikely, however, in the face of the celebrity status which critics now enjoy. In his last question to Derrida, Salusinszky asks how Derrida's "great fame" has affected his work: "I suppose," Salusinszky says, "this is partly a voyeuristic question, but I ask it on behalf of all those who will read this interview: do you think your work is affected by the reality of going about everywhere and seeing your work, your name, in discussion?" A far more pertinent question is the effect of Derrida's fame on the work of Salusinszky and his contemporaries, now in their first years in the literary-critical field. Visions of fame were once the luxury of writers and artists—the sort of people critics used to study; now they can be seriously entertained by critics themselves.

While fame is not possible in every calling, when it does become so, the environment of that pursuit is irrevocably altered. Debates over principles and issues begin giving way to talk of colleagues receiving media coverage; one thinks less about the advancement of ideas than simple advancement. Northrop Frye, commenting on the quality of contemporary critical essays, says, "One feels that the reason for their existence is simply to get [the author] on a dean's list, and that the notion of the pursuit of a structure, or of knowledge, so that it gets clearer in the mind, is just something you haven't the time for." In his reply, Salusinszky lays the blame on society, which "cuts back funding to the universities." Although it might be more painful, the critical establishment would be better off looking to itself in order to understand how this predicament came about.

H. E. Bates, storyteller

H. E. Bates A Month By the Lake & Other Stories. New Directions, 212 pages, $17.95

reviewed by Brock Baker

This is a selection of short works by the English short-story writer and novelist H. E. Bates, who died in 1974. Chronologically, they range from his first published work, "The Flame," which appeared in 1926, to the title story of his last collection, "The Song of the Wren" (1972). Included are two stories by "Flying Officer X," the pseudonym adopted by Bates while serving in the British Army during World War II.

What an extraordinary writer H. E. Bates could be! One first notes his exuberant power of physicality, of evoking settings with delicate intensity: the look and feel of early fall by an Italian lake in the title story, or the summer fields throughout "The Cowslip Field"; the bleak cold of a military airfield in "It's Just the Way It Is," or the hollow bonhomie of an inexpensive London restaurant on a Saturday night ("The Flame"). Then there are the plots. In "A Month By the Lake," he is able to dangle before us the destinies of two unattached and unspectacular persons until our engrossment takes on the status of a personal investment in a happy ending which, at the same time, we don't dare anticipate in case we are disappointed. In "Cowslip," told in the first person by a very young boy who is being taken on an expedition to find "the cowslip field," the sadnesses of his companion, a plain young rural woman, are gradually disclosed —yet by the child's affection for her and their shared delight in the flowering countryside they are made almost sacred. And in "Where the Cloud Breaks," perhaps my favorite of this remarkable group of stories, a retired colonel living alone in a picturesque country cottage and already getting a little daffy as a result has only one friend, a spinster lady a few years younger, with whom he communicates by semaphore since

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he is in perpetual warfare with "progress" and eschews as many modern conveniences as he possibly can, including the telephone. One day she gives him a nasty shock: a television set has been installed in a corner of her living room, and she invites him to watch it with her in the evenings. His friendly feelings for her, that have often almost but not quite welled over into expressions of love, are crushed. He is bitterly disappointed at her betrayal of all the values he thought they held in common, that made him feel close to her. He rushes back to his lonely, disorderly cottage, thoroughly shaken. I will leave the reader there, only adding that in its non-horrified or patronizing exploration of the yearnings, emotional and sexual, of the no longer young, "Where" is remarkable, if not unique, in modern Anglo-American literature.

But all the stories have a great deal to recommend them. "It's Just the Way It Is," by "Flying Officer X," locates the bravery or enterprise that the horrors of wars can bring out in those who fight them in an unexpected place, in the officer who meets with the angry, grieving parents of a young pilot killed while under his command. "The Chords of Youth" is an elaborate, brilliantly sustained spoof of postwar small-town politicking between self-serving representatives of opposing powers; in this case, officials of small towns in Germany and England, who get drunk together at a dinner given in their honor by an elderly English lady who is certain she knew, and was a little bit in love with, the fat, gluttonous German mayor when he was a dashing young mountaineer before the war.

H. E. Bates's reputation is no longer what it was, and all of his story collections and most of his novels have fallen out of print. While he had and continues to have many distinguished admirers, especially of his stories—Graham Greene has compared his "best tales" to those of Chekhov, as quoted in the jacket copy—to most readers born since World War II, contemporaries such as Evelyn Waugh, or Greene himself, are much better known, perhaps because their works seemed better suited to the times. But starting with this artful selection, American readers at least can begin to appreciate him (or appreciate him anew) at his true worth. These are "tales" full of strong, active, fructifying feelings, and their author has a capacity for imaginative sympathy that is almost miraculous; for instance, his portrait of a complicated and dignified woman character like Miss Bentley in "A Month By the Lake" is as satisfying as, say, Anita Brookner's in the best of her recent highly acclaimed novels.

All in all, a very fine book, and since the idea of putting out a new selection of Bates's short stories originated with the publisher, everyone concerned at New Directions Books is to be congratulated.

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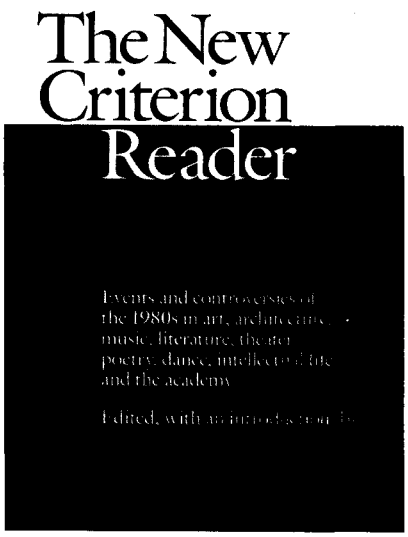

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Notebook

The new café society

by Michael Brandow

He imagined himself among them now, his own face staring, like theirs, from the makeshift posters on café walls, in the subways.
—David Leavitt, *The Lost Language of Cranes*

A recent article in *Esquire* on the power structure of literary New York remarked that there are no "literary hangouts" for people under sixty ("*Esquire*'s Guide to the Literary Universe," August 1987). But it all depends on what you mean by "literary." If we're to believe Tama Janowitz, the celebrated author of *Slaves of New York,* there are such things as "literary videos." So why not "literary cafés" for the young folk? (In the world of fiction, anything is possible!) When *The New York Times* devoted several glossy pages last spring to "New York's Spinning Literary Circles"—a sort of lifestyles-of-the-rich-and-famous approach to the new literary elite—it featured a supper club on West Fourteenth Street called Nell's. Nell's is the same hotbed of intellectual fervor that *Vanity Fair* announced as the new meeting place for the power brokers, adding, in the magazine's all too infrequently ironic tone, that the place "flickers with exclusivity."

And not without reason. Nell is reputed to have turned away from her doors no less than Cher, the former Queen Bee of Studio 54. And who is this sassy redhead? Nell Campbell is a second-rate actress of *Rocky Horror* fame who, with the help of the city's nightclub establishment (who've made her hostess of this new venture), has managed to set up court for the new literati—much as Elaine did for another generation. *Spy* magazine recently reported that Nell has been seen "thrusting her legs and/or breasts in the faces of suspecting customers." To such efforts at winning the esteem of our greatest young minds, we can only reply: *fab*ulous!

If we are to let language be our guide, we should expect such a "literary café" to be a place for intimate chats, witty *repartie,* and maybe historically poignant one-liners. "We are a sort of galaxy of our own" were Jay McInerney's words to the *Times* about his *cercle intime* at Nell's, which includes spanking-young editors Gary Fisketjon and Morgan Entrekin of Atlantic Monthly Press. Whatever region of the cosmos McInerney was in when he made that statement, he and other fabulous celebrities like Tama Janowitz and Bret Easton Ellis are clearly part of a new kind of literary café society in a city increasingly antithetical to any semblance of the artful life. The model, as for insecure social circles the world over, is naïvely Parisian. Why, with its aging mirrors, dark wood paneling, and lofty ceiling fans, Nell's even has that old "Euro" look! And even less elegant spots are being granted European-style status. *The New York Times* reported dreamy-eyed young author Gary Glickman asking of another of his favorite hangouts, a "dingy hole in the wall" in the West Village: "Is it the Cafe de Flore?"

But unlike Sartre and de Beauvoir at the

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Deux Magots, the new glitterati are interested in being seen and not heard. The Continent, in fact, would be appalled by such conspicuous displays of consumption—without even the mask of "good taste" being offered as an excuse. For Nell's is a stage for a new breed of young professionals ("writers" included) who come from the upper ranks of the middle class. As *Esquire* put it (sarcastically), Nell's is the place "to find people who starve for art." But not just anyone qualifies for that distinction. There are those who line the street in front of Nell's and aren't chosen for admission by the doormen. They are left to feel humiliated: they have the money, if only someone would let them spend it! What's more important than money, of course, is having the right mannerisms and attitudes and at least a tenuous connection with the son or daughter of someone important. "I like people who look interesting," Nell told Polly Toynbee in *The Washington Monthly* ("Nell's Place and What It Says About New York," January 1988). "English accents are a plus. Chic Japanese too. I look through my peephole and see how they look. I know English people find it really offensive, but it's the accepted way in New York. Awful, isn't it?"

Having made it through the elaborate *rite de passage* at Nell's front door, young writers in search of the latest subject matter can proceed to rub elbows with the big shots: fabulous young architects still living off Mummy, daughters of famous fashion arbiters for Saks, *Interview* clones, and the like. They can feel their importance as they lay out six dollars for a drink. (This and the ten-dollar cover charge are merely formalities to recall that one has, indeed, been granted passage—a sort of "pinch" from reality.)

The layout of the club itself is rather charming in places. A playful collection of second-hand couches is strewn about. Beyond, a jazz band plays. The guests are relaxed and jovial—they know they're here because they were meant to be. Many of them are European, and the cosmopolitan air definitely has a Twenties feel.

Downstairs, beyond the dance floor, is another sitting area, lowly lit with dusty chandeliers: a twilight effect for that worn, aristocratic look. Beneath this dull flicker, the strategically placed couches are claimed early on, leaving many of the guests standing. It might seem that stuffing so many people into a small nightclub that "flickers with exclusivity" would be self-defeating. But paradox is a necessary ingredient of hobnobbing. The fabulous few are like des Esseintes, the eccentric aristocrat in Huysmans' *A rebours*, who built his singular retreat "to avoid the hordes of Paris, whose proximity, nonetheless, confirmed his own solitude."

A head count shows that a large number of the evening's chosen few are attractive Oriental women. They circulate at intervals under the pretense of borrowing cigarettes. The green felt on the walls, in fact, makes this hermetic place of breeding seem like some strange hybrid of a gentleman's club and a bordello. But green was the best choice, being the color of envy and hope.

The coverage of Nell's in *Vanity Fair* and *The New York Times* stresses elitism for its own sake, a sort of peacock display of those who've "made it" (according to their own shimmery standards) to be contemplated by those who haven't. But there are others among the city's gifted youth who wouldn't *think* of being seen at Nell's. And indeed, we're forced to admit—resisting what seems to be a primeval attraction to all that flickers—there's really no big deal about the place. A contrived collection of writer-stars, film producers on the make, fashion holocaust victims, and wealthy debutantes who throw parties for them all—these compose the true social strata of McInerney's "galaxy."

But where do "serious" writers find time for all this socializing? Are they in clubs taking notes for their next novels? Does this contrived nightlife scene really appeal to them? Apparently so. "New York has lost none of its cachet or importance for these writers," the *Times* reported. "No matter where their residence, they seem to spend as much time in the city as out of it." And their

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New York is, among other things, a place where fabulous young writers and their fabulous young editors can be seen riding the tide of one brief success—wearing dark sunglasses, smoking cigarettes (just like grown-ups!), and ordering Chartreuse. Before going to Nell's, maybe they'll make a stop at the Union Square Café for some oysters and champagne. Or dinner at Maxim's, another wing of this extended salon, where literary posing is set against an appropriately *nouveau* backdrop of *fin de siècle* inspiration. There's decadence in the late-night air, Ivy League style: tame, very tame.

Much of the new popular fiction describes the current social scene. (Or maybe the scene itself is drawn from the fiction?) We see lives in transition, the long and painful process of making connections, of resorting to drugs and prostitution; and we are given sympathetic descriptions of those who have not yet attained fabulosity. McInerney's *Bright Lights, Big City*—soon to appear as a film with Michael J. Fox—is, of course, the archetype of this school. His main character, intimately addressed in the second person throughout the story, is a young aspiring writer trapped in the bureaucracy of a large magazine. Down on his luck, he can still count on his flashy friend Tad Allagash—a coked-out socialite with no literary aspirations—to get him into the best clubs. At the end of the story, we find our hero begging for bread in SoHo. Strung out on cocaine, out of a job, he eventually trades his expensive Ray-Ban sunglasses for a bag of hard rolls.

In David Leavitt's *The Lost Language of Cranes,* the main character works as a mere copy-editor in a publishing house. He is nonetheless granted passage to the clubs by his friend Eliot who, like Allagash, is allowed to push ahead of the less important club-goers lining the street. Fortunately, Leavitt's images of New York life are on a much more human scale. Unlike McInerney and his cool lack of analysis, Leavitt doesn't dwell on glossy, babylonian images for their own sake. But his milieu is much the same.

Tama Janowitz, now known to most people through her advertising stunts rather than her books, gives another kind of look at artistic bohemia. Despite her occasional jabs at despotic gallery owners, she is herself a product of the Warhol circle, and her attempts at social criticism seem to come from personal grudges rather than from any deeply felt conviction. Prostitution, literal or figurative, is the unifying theme of *Slaves of New York,* and several of the stories are luridly detailed with rent prices, figures jumping out in brass-tacks fashion. The financial woes of VISA card billings have also been a favorite theme of McInerney's. These are things with which most young urban readers can sympathize—which probably explains the success of such books: they constitute common-denominator literature for people who don't really like literature that much.

The new expatriate writer Catherine Texier—one token French figure is needed for any bohemia—gives a similar account of the New York struggle in a novel called *Love Me Tender,* although Texier is much more analytical and cutting than her young American counterparts. A widowed demimondaine is described in the story:

> She needed the security of money. Was always attracted to it. She had no taste for poverty. Even bohemian poverty. She used to say, you've got to come from the middle class to enjoy bohemian poverty.

You've also got to come from the middle class to *write* about bohemian poverty and hope to make the connections required to have your book published. The irony is that these young writers have made their money by documenting the very "struggle" they had to "endure" before becoming known. Now that they're fabulous, it will be interesting to see what they produce. Do they have a second act?

Recent innovations in social lit. include Tama Janowitz's second book, *A Cannibal in Manhattan* (dedicated to her late friend Andy Warhol). This is the story of an unsuspecting tribesman who falls in love with a

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rich New Yorker vacationing on his native island. She brings him back to her own island, where he becomes involved in the intrigues of art dealer-criminals. Here Tama has shown her versatility by combining her usual postmodern Eighties cynicism with primitive Sixties exoticism *à la Flintstones.* No doubt the idea of throwing a party at Trader Vic's as a publicity stunt for the book was very clever, as was Tama's outfit of that evening: she wore a pink satin dress with a large bone in her hair. But which idea came first, we wonder: the party or the book? Predictably enough, both *Cannibal* and *Slaves* are currently being made into movies.

As for the recent works of the galaxy's brightest star, Jay McInerney's film version of *Bright Lights* will no doubt explode, given the tremendous pre-release coverage in *Esquire, Vanity Fair, Manhattan, Inc.,* and *The New York Times Magazine.* McInerney's more literary endeavors include *Ransom*—an early novel that was brought out after the success of *Bright Lights* and that clearly could have stayed in the drawer—and some recent short stories. "The Story of My Life" (*Esquire,* August, 1987) is a cool like step into like the clothes of an East Village like valley girl nympho-brat (like); it has been made into a "play" by a fan in Cleveland. Another short story, "Rise and Fall," recently in *Manhattan, Inc.,* is a tale of a yuppie's ordeal during Wall Street's Black Monday; extremely current, it reeks of opportunism while claiming to be the "voice" of a generation—and so it is.

So we shouldn't underestimate the effects of marketing on "literary" trends, especially as consumerism and "culture" become less and less distinguishable. Printed works are recycled almost overnight, changed into movies, plays, audio-cassettes, and downright advertising copy. Whatever their "literary" talents, McInerney and Janowitz have shown a keen ability to package even themselves, appearing in ads for the other commodities of New York café society. On the cover of *Bright Lights,* for example, is a dark-haired young man who could very well be McInerney himself. He's looking up at the neon sign for the Odeon Café. The Odeon, a favorite haunt of the late Andy Warhol, is owned by Keith McNally, who is also the owner of Café Luxembourg, and—God help us—Nell's.

The recent advertising forays of Tama Janowitz include a spread for Rose's Lime Juice: Tama stands on a desk in a leather jacket legibly scrawled with the hip graffiti of Keith Haring; Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., Professor of Humanities at the City University of New York, sits shyly in his academic bow tie, looking ridiculous for his complicity, on a chair below her. In another ad, for Amaretto di Saronno, we see Tama sitting at a small round café table (just like Paris!), leaning next to a stack of books and scribbling onto a notepad. Simone de Beauvoir? The Café de Flore, indeed.

In the whirlwind of Hollywood dealing, Tama and friends probably didn't attend the recent reading in New York by the French writer Nathalie Sarraute, but they should have. Sarraute talked about having spent many years writing at her table in an inconspicuous café on the Avenue Marceau, until the owner finally recognized her from a newspaper photo. Then in her eighties, she had just been presented with the Grand Prix National. But a low profile would hardly be acceptable to New York's young and upwardly mobile. No one has the time to write at Nell's, but literature flows like wine just the same—California wine with an expensive French name.

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Letters

The facts about Frank Lloyd Wright

To the Editors:

Grateful as I have reason to be for the learned and often complimentary review by Thomas Hines of my biography of Frank Lloyd Wright, *Many Masks* ("In the Nature of the Architect," January, 1988), I would like to correct what I consider a distressing factual misstatement contained in the review. Having mentioned Robert Twombly's biography of Wright, Professor Hines refers to "such seminal critical treatments as Henry-Russell Hitchcock's *In the Nature of Materials: The Buildings of Frank Lloyd Wright, 1887-1941* (1942); Grant Manson's *Frank Lloyd Wright to 1910: The First Golden Age* (1958); and Norris Kelly Smith's *Frank Lloyd Wright: A Study in Architectural Content* (1966)," and adds, "Unfortunately, Gill's failure to cite such predecessors echoes Wright's own reluctance to acknowledge influences." This is simply not the case. In the course of writing *Many Masks,* I often consulted with my old friend Hitchcock, and his name is cited a dozen times in my index; when I quote for the first time from his book, I give its title in full in my chapter notes. Similarly, Manson's book is noted both in the text and in my chapter notes and his name in the index is followed by a large number of page citations. As for Mr. Smith's book, it isn't mentioned because I happened not to make use of it. What, then, does my purported failure consist of?

I am happy to take this opportunity to correct an error of omission that, though he doesn't say so, concerns Professor Hines. Wright's subtraction of two years from his age was well known to his family and among his friends—as I note in my book, I challenged his veracity in respect to this very matter when we last spoke together, and he was not in the least embarrassed by my doing so. Still, it was Professor Hines who nailed down the actual date, once and for all, and I ought to have given him public credit for this feat. He would perhaps then have felt less tempted to accuse me of building my story about Wright's incessant lying upon the "unacknowledged researches of scholars." Most of the examples of Wright's lying that I cite are based upon my own researches and upon interviews with such survivors of Wright's whoppers as Walter H. Kilham, Jr., Stanley Marcus, and Philip Johnson, to say nothing of members of his own family. Professor Hines might also have felt less tempted to rebuke me, however gently, for "such pardonable errors as giving certain Wright clients the wrong first names." It would be helpful in future editions of the book to have such errors corrected, if indeed they exist; in order to demonstrate that good can come out of ill, I am prepared to donate to the Frank Lloyd Wright Home & Studio Foundation one hundred dollars for every wrong first name of a Wright client that Professor Hines is able to cite.

In closing, let me correct a trifling error that has crept into Professor Hines's review. He says that after Wright and Mrs. Cheney eloped to Europe, in 1909, neither of their spouses would consent to a divorce. In fact, the ever-obliging Edwin Cheney gave Mrs. Cheney her freedom as rapidly as he could, securing a divorce from her

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on the grounds of desertion in the summer of 1911.

Brendan Gill
New York City

Thomas Hines replies:

I am pleased that Brendan Gill found my review of his *Many Masks* "learned and often complimentary." I regret that I must repeat my assertion that this very interesting book is woefully underdocumented. My statement concerning Gill's "failure to cite" such Wright authorities as Hitchcock, Manson, Smith, and Twombly should have read "failure to cite *sufficiently*," since there is, I repeat, no *citation* of Twombly anywhere in the footnotes. There is *one* citation of Manson and one of a single *caption* from Hitchcock's *In the Nature of Materials* (both on page 521). Full documentation may not always seem essential to the "general reader" concerned chiefly with "the story," but for more engaged students, historians, and Wright admirers, it is important to know where authors get their material and where readers should go next in further exploring the topic. The scant footnotes and the absence of a bibliography weaken what is in other ways a provocative reassessment of Wright.

Other smaller matters which are no doubt of interest *only* to the specialists: After Wright and Mamah Cheney eloped to Europe in 1909, Edwin Cheney *did* agree to a divorce in 1911, but Catherine Wright did not do so until 1922, long after Mamah Cheney's death.

In regard to that other relatively minor matter of clients' names, my reviewer's copy of bound galleys (page 213) gave Mrs. Freeman's name as "Dorothy," but this was corrected in the published book to "Harriet" (page 318). I regret that I did not see this correction when I examined the published version. Yet Edward L. Doheny is given the middle initial of "H." in both reviewer's and published versions. I still hope Mr. Gill will send his proffered one hundred dollars, not only to the Oak Park Foundation, which is relatively well supported, but to the Freeman House in Los Angeles (Harriet's, not Dorothy's), which is now a sadly crumbling ruin, and for which funds are needed by its new owner, the University of Southern California.

MARGARET SCOLARI BARR 1901-1987

It is with great sadness that we inform our readers of the death of Margaret Scolari Barr on December 30, 1987. Mrs. Barr's "Our Campaigns," her chronicle of the career of Alfred H. Barr, Jr., was published in *The New Criterion*'s special issue for the summer of 1987.

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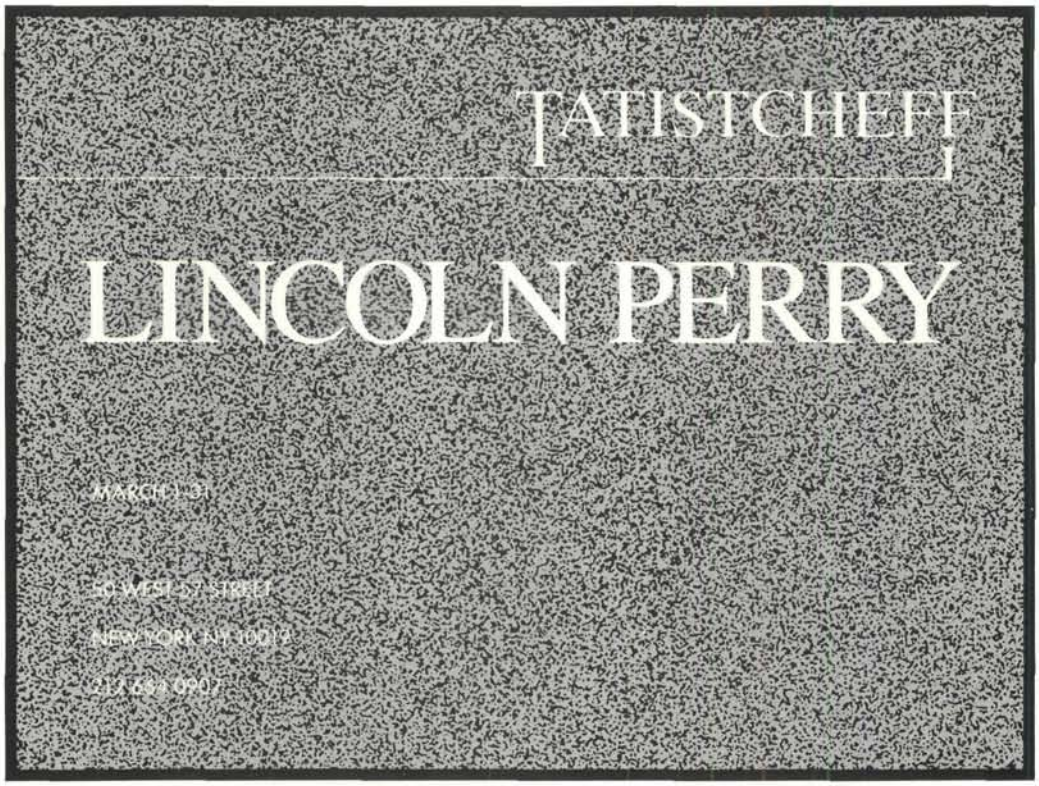

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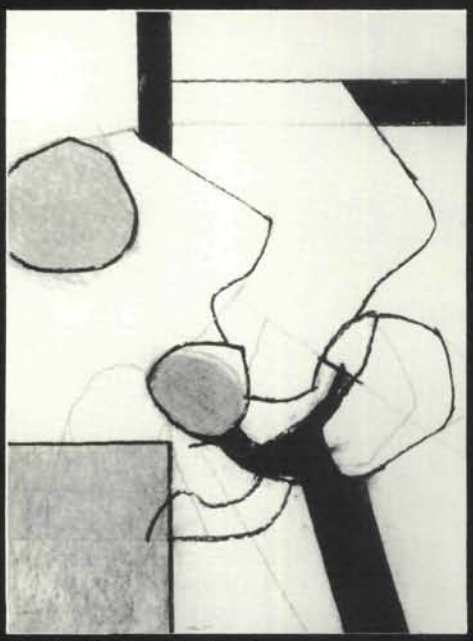

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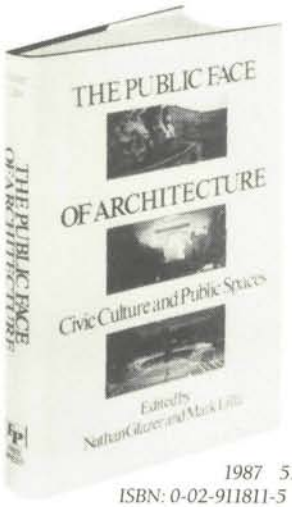

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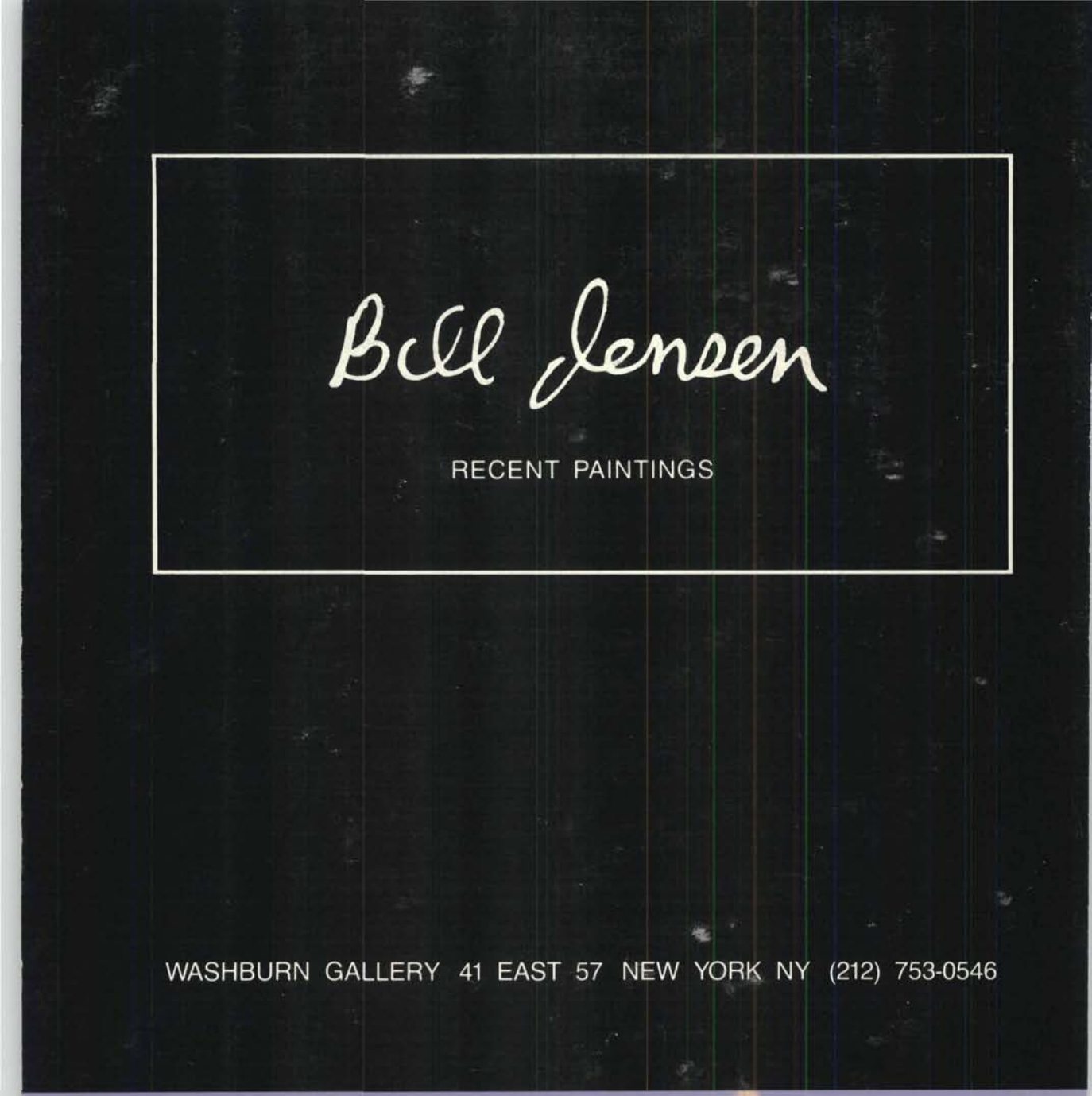

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